



IT, Take Three by Harry Truman Wilson

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Summary: Pennywise, killed by losers as children and adults in both the 1950s and 1980s timelines, is granted one more opportunity. Except, this time, he is able to make a few subtle changes to give himself a distinct advantage. Now, as children in 1989, the losers must face their toughest challenge yet. (MikeXStan, RichieXEddie, Bill/BenXBeverley. M because Richie cusses like a sailor.)

1. Prelude: In the Multiverse

It, Take Three

Introduction: Through a Rat Hole

It was dead. Or as dead as it could be. Pennywise the Clown, menace of Derry for over a millennium, killed by a bunch of kids. Then, killed again, once and for all, by grown up versions of those kids. Hell, it wasn't even all of them. It had used nearly all of its energy to cause Stanley Uris to kill himself. And then, nearly everything left to get Henry Bowers to hurt Mike Hanlon long enough to isolate him from the others. And still, it wasn't enough. It had been overwhelmed by the others, and now, here it was, out in the Multiverse, with no sense of anything. A ghost maybe...though It had once been a ghost, to terrify the children of Derry. And that thing was more corporeal than he was now. Or ever would be. This was the punishment. It had come as like a meteor down to earth and now, it was gone from the planet again, like as not, never to return.

In fact, It's death had happened more than once. It didn't understand it, though It never really tried. And now, it didn't matter, because It was dead. But, it had fought the children four times. The first was in an earlier time, where the children were born in an era after the destructive Second World War. Those children, and the adults later, had beaten It with the ritual...Chud...the ritual of the stupid Turtle. The Turtle should have been dead, should have choked on its only galactic vomit, but instead, it gave the children what they needed...even as adults, and so, It was dead.

The second time was later, in another era, of violence and disruption, of the greatest threats to the people of Derry, Maine, fading in the collapse of a place called the Soviet Union. And in that year, It had faced children who hadn't even heard of that stupid, dead Turtle, and still...the children did the Chud and defeated It. And they did it again as adults...and killed It. And so...It...was dead.

Maybe it was that both time strings led to the same place. History was known to be obdurate, after all, and tended toward similar paths. But, It didn't care of course. Because there was nothing it could do in

this state. Floating in the multiverse...floating without being, no understanding of its surrounding...no true place...no place...

It...

It stirred. Something was happening. A sound, or maybe a being was reaching for It. Something of great power. Something like...like...that stupid...

It...see me...

There was suddenly blinding light, then It had a form again, the enormous, horrible face of its clown form. The same terror It had tried to use to kill Bill Denbrough. And yet...the face was soon dwarfed by something enormous. The thing was hairless, a long, pink snake-like thing curling around the face, sliding through nothingness and moving with a sense of urgency despite that, to It, the thing seemed to be endless.

It...you...are dead... It finally turned the face and moved the eyes to follow the thing, which it now understood to be a tail, until It was looking into the dark black eyes of the head of a rat. Not just any rat, It knew, this was the guardian, Chuchundra. The rat tilted his head slightly, flipping his wide black ears and shifting his body to shake his thick coat of fur. Chuchundra opened his mouth, revealing two sets of long, sharpened incisors that clicked together twice before he spread his jaw wide, exposing the dark, dank opening that lead deeper to his throat. And, like the record players of the Derry that had been Its home, words simply started to project from the opening.

It...you have lost...and you are dead... the Rat explained, then slowly moved one of his paws, with big, hairless pink fingers, clenched the thing into a fist, then opened it again, *But...you don't have to be.* The creature's paw opened and closed again, then he lowered his head and signaled to the clown with a twitch of the ugly round spot on its face that was its nose.

I can help you...return you...to your previous form, not here or now, but a certain earlier time and place, with all the knowledge and experience you possess...

Useless...It surprised itself somewhat, that It could answer the creature in this void but It continued nonetheless, The result will be the same...they will destroy me...as they always have...

You have lost to them in two time strings, two dimensions, but, in the rat hole I create...a time string may appear which could save you. And my brothers...

Brothers? The other guardians...like the stupid Turtle! Or the ugly Fish or the terrible Lion or the meddlesome Eagle...

This is the arrangement, The Rat's great tail slid around Its form, and started wrapping around It a second time, and It began to suspect that there wasn't a way to escape this offer, You will be transported through the hole I create in space-time. And as you go, you will make changes...small, reasonable, modifications that will not cause instability, but will give you the advantage...Then, you will return to a time in Derry and try again against the children. When—or better if—you win, you will return to me here, in the multiverse and help me restore the beams...by adjusting that history to prevent the death of the other guardians.

Fine...I will protect the other guardians...But...if I lose to the brats anyway...or if I cannot return to you here...

You will be in no worse state than now...and I will have lost nothing but a small bit of energy...but, if you succeed against the children, and do not return to me and save my brethren you believe are stupid or ugly or terrible, I will cause my rat tunnel to collapse, trapping you in my time string and erasing you from history.... It supposed as much, but It didn't care. Because once it had a form again...once the "loser" club was destroyed once and for all, even this sneaky, foolish Rat couldn't do anything to It.

Then...I will go...and do as you say, It expressed. The face of the clown, of Pennywise faded, and soon, It felt its form shifting, into something more soul or spirit like. The Rat's clawed paws began to move quickly, digging the hole into the multiverse, and suddenly, It was in it, falling backward into time, becoming stronger and stronger and stronger. More real, more corporeal. After what was only a few minutes, or maybe a few moments, It was alive. It was powerful, and only getting stronger, and soon, it gained a new ability...and that

mean, this time, it would destroy the children once and for all...

There was the slow creaking of the crank. It began with mostly metal on rust, scratching where the crank met the gears. Then, the sound of the music box began to make the loud noises of the famous *Carousel*, the sounds of a carnival, of a loving and caring clown. There were wind pipes that screamed, cymbals that crashed, and slowly, the curtain on of the stage was drawn back to reveal the star of this show, Pennywise the Clown.

"Ladies and Gentleman! Welcome, to this great performance!" Pennywise yelled, jumping onto the stage and holding up his arms in excitement. He turned to wave to the many audience members of his show, the many people who would witness his great comeback...and this bloody, but oh so fun, circus act, "May I present, the story of *It, Take Three*...ha-ha-ha!" Pennywise collapsed into laughter, then took a few haunting steps back and was suddenly above the stage. He opened his hands, and strings appeared, tied to his fingers, and connected to the puppets now sitting on the stage. Pennywise began to cackle, then his back burst open with a thunderous and ugly sounding rip, and another hand appeared, with another set of strings that connected to new puppet. This was followed by another tear, then more, until there were six arms from Pennywise, and then, with a loud twist and crack of its right leg, it suddenly had a seventh appendage to grip it from. Each wielded puppet strings, and finally, seven puppets bounced jerkily onto the stage.

"Featuring," Pennywise began again through another loud cackle, "*The Losers Club*! It might surprise you to learn, however, that this club isn't quite as you remember it..." Pennywise moved a hand, and manipulated one puppet to move forward, a pale child with brown bangs that slicked over his face and a scrawny form that jerked violently at Pennywise's direction..

"This is the fearless leader, Bill Denbrough, brave boy, with a little bit of a st-st-st-stutter. A stutter, that gave him strength, used to spit out bad poetry to get over the condition. Wouldn't it be a shame if the poems were meaningless, because he doesn't have a stutter..." Pennywise started to move Bill's mouth quickly, and it began to move effortlessly and with no difficulty. Pennywise gave a big grin, then used another hand to move a young girl with short hair, a tight dress

and certain spunk forward. She was followed by another boy, wild black hair, thick glasses, and an oversized mouth on his face.

"And here, we have Beverly Marsh. Tough girl, gonna show Daddy who's boss. Not gonna be pushed around...and this is Richie Tozier, a loud mouthed boy with a bad attitude and even worse at making accents, but, he's good enough to give my tongue a hard bite. Let's see if we can mellow these two out..." Pennywise danced the two together, then began to spin Beverley, "Bev here might not be so tough...if it wasn't her daddy, but her momma who was the old grump around the house...maybe she'd even show a little class..." Beverly's hair grew out, and her dress lengthened and became looser, "Now Richie here...he's best buds with Bill here, he'd do near anything for him...unless of course, Bill did something unforgivable one summer, and...well, look at the torment on the boy's face..." Richie's puppet turned and shoved Bill's back, then he, Beverley and Bill puppets moved to the side, and two other puppets stepped forward, one was a short, fat boy, the other a skinny, small one with a broken arm and small cast around it.

"This is Ben Hanscom, and this is Eddie Kaspbrak. Now, Ben, he's a big boy, real smart, good reader and a clear loser, because of the poor fella's weight. And Eddie, oh, Eddie, his mother is a bit of a hypochondriac. Sends her poor boy to get pills out the wazoo, but they don't do nothing, not really! Those sad features give both them strength, so, let's make a small change. Ben, a bit less fat, a bit more muscle, and maybe books won't mean so much, and Eddie, well, if he really had a disease, lets say...diabetes. Makes for a different tale, don't you think?" Ben's shape changed dramatically, his arms and shoulders growing big while his stomach tightened into abs, while Eddie gripped his abdomen and appeared rather pained. Pennywise moved them aside, and brought forward two more, a young, strong looking black boy and a thin, skinny boy with orderly, though curly, hair.

"And this is Michael Hanlon and Stanley Uris, our diversity hires... Mike here is black and Stan here is a Jew. Mike's family owns a farm, though, its not clear what happened to his dad, who taught him so much about life. Did he die of old age, as happened back in the fifties, or was he burned up with his mother, as happened in the 80s?

How about we...split the baby. Daddy Hanlon will burn, all by himself, when Mike's a baby, then, he'll be raised by a distraught mother and abusive grandfather... makes for an easily disturbed boy I'd say...and Stan...Stan was the most afraid. Even killable in old age, fucking sad-sap. But, how high will his screams go...if I made the boy a sissy?" Mike's puppet was surrounded by fire that it fell back and drew away from, while Stan's clasped its hands together and looked away. Pennywise let out another loud cackle, then the music began to play louder and louder.

"Now, ladies and gentlemen, sit back, and enjoy the show..." Pennywise laughs, then presses one hand against the edge of the story, turning to look directly at you, the reader of this piece.

"We're going to put our story in the 80s, more fun and horror to work with, you see, and our boys are gonna be 13 when this begins..." Pennywise's round, red nose starts to push against these words, giving you a shiver. You see him, his powdered face, his haunting yellow eyes...It is visible for just a moment in your screen...or is it?

"I hope you're not expecting our brave heroes to win as they did in the past, or even live through this story...where would the fun in that be?" Pennywise roars with laughter, right at you as a reader, then falls backward, laughing so hard that he slips back into the house at 29 Neibolt Street, just in time for Bill Denbrough, leading the Loser's Club, to open the front door with a long, low creaking noise.

And now...our story will begin...he-he-he, ha-ha-ha!

2. Chapter 1: House on Neibolt Street

Bill took a deep breath, and then pointed his flashlight into the house. It was really dark, despite missing most of the glass on the windows, and in some sense, it seemed exactly like what Bill imagined an abandoned house would be. There were the broken remains of living room furniture in one room, a doorway that probably led to a kitchen, another that led to a bathroom, and two sets of stairs, one heading up, the other going down. Bill tried to consider the layout, think of a plan for searching the home. Looking for...it. That thing, that weird, evil, clown creature that had killed his brother...that had tortured him and the members of the Losers Club that stood behind him. He was going to find It, and he was going to kill It, no matter what.

"Okay..." Bill started, taking a deep breath, then looking back at his motley crew. Beverly, wearing a long, white and blue dress, the wind blowing her long, straight and neat brown hair, was standing on the steps leading to the house. But the other five boys were standing further back. Richie, unsurprisingly, was giving Bill a dark look and had his arms crossed, probably refusing to move and mad about the same shit as always. Further back, Eddie and Stan were standing near the gate on the edge of the old home. Neither seemed rather interested in moving forward, though Eddie seemed less like to take off running. Finally, the two new boys, Ben and Mike, were closer, but still seemed hesitant to follow Bill onto the steps. Ben probably would, the strong, well-shaped boy, a wrestler and track star who'd been at their school for only a year, had been incredibly kind and helpful to Bill and the losers, despite his ease in joining "popular" kids. Mike would probably too. Bill had heard stories from his mother about what blacks did and were known to have done, assumptions about being lazy, threatening, and stupid, but Mike hadn't proven any of them true. In fact, Mike seemed to be nearly as friendly and obliging as Ben was. No matter what anyone else did, however, Bill knew, in fact, felt in his heart, that he had to go into that house and face the creature. Face the thing that had take Georgie. Face the thing...that had killed his brother.

Thusly, Bill was about to take a step into the house by himself when

Stan shouted suddenly.

"Wait! Wait! Before we..." Stan hesitated, then gripped a rung on the iron gate and seemed unable to move forward, "Before we go... shouldn't somebody keep watch...out here...just in case something bad happens..." Bill, as well as the others, all looked at the scraggily Jewish boy. Stan crossed a foot and began digging in the heel, his eyes downcast, as though he knew he was being a coward. But Bill knew well that he couldn't help it. Nonetheless, Bill felt himself growing irritated with his effeminate and easily terrified friend, and looked to the others.

"Goddamned chicken..." Bill muttered under his breath, then cleared his throat, "Who wants to stay out here then?" Bill's heart dropped as everyone except Ben raised their hands. The others looked at each other, then at Ben, who shrugged.

"I'm not afraid of a goddamned clown or balloon...besides, I'm also not stupid enough to follow it down the gym hallways that thing was trying to lead me..." Ben grumbled, "I won't fall for any tricks in there..." Bill sighed, then looked at Richie, who gave him a sour look. *Now Richie?* Bill thought, *Are you going to make our shared fight with a clown about...about that?*

"Well, I personally am not convinced Bill is the best leader for this mission. Frankly, I think I'd rather follow Ben. I be thinking hesa much better leader, eh, hombre?" Richie switched to his terrible, flat Mexican accent, and was about to continue when Eddie, whose irritation with Richie had caused him to brave the lawn of the Neibolt house, jabbed Richie with an angry finger.

"Beep-beep Richie!" Eddie said, repeating the Loser club's normal way of shutting up their friend, "We're not having a vote on leadership. We're deciding who's going in and who gets to stay out...And there's only one fair way to do it..." Eddie leaned down to the grass of the lawn slowly, groaning slightly through what sounded to Bill like abdominal pain. Soon, he had found six sticks, and he broke three to make them shorter, "Four in, three out...assuming you're going either way Bill..."

"Yeah...I am. And three of you should be enough backup...But I'm

doing this for Georgie...if one of you...doesn't care or isn't..." Bill began, then trailed off. After a moment, Ben cleared his throat.

"We're here to face the good to me..." Ben said. Beverly nodded in support, as did Mike and Richie, who agreed in another offensively bad accent, this time doing his "clever Frenchman".

"Oh ho, yes, zat is very good, we-we!"

"Beep-beep, Richie!" Bill spat. He looked at Stan, who was still gripping the fence tightly. The curly haired boy didn't look up at Bill with more than a glance, but he nodded slowly anyway. Eddie went to him first, and Stan let out a long sigh of relief as he held up a long stick. Bill let out an equally long sigh when Beverly picked out a long stick as well. Mike was not as lucky, drawing a short stick he flung on the ground.

"God-dammit!" Mike spat. He shook his head, then Stan held out a hand to him.

"Be careful," Stan said.

"Yeah, yeah I will be," Mike responded. Bill looked at Mike, and remembered that he and Stan knew each other. After Mike's father burned in a fire, his mother had started working at Derry general, the same hospital where Stan's father was a part-time chaplain. Or whatever the Jewish equivalent of a chaplain was. That was part of why Mike had run to the Losers in the barrens, trying to flee from Henry Bowers. He'd seen Stan and Stan had seen him. And Mike had careened toward them as quick as he could, to hide behind Stan of all people.

Ben got lucky too, drawing a long stick, which got both Richie and Eddie cursing loudly.

"Fuck Eddie!" Richie roared. Eddie looked at him, then down at his hand, which held two short sticks.

"Fuck Richie!"

"Come on you two!" Bill ordered, "And you, Mike!" Eddie and Richie began pushing each other forward, but Mike stepped past them both

and went to stand next to Bill at the doorway.

"Are you scared?" Bill asked.

"Nothing worse than I've seen on my granddad's farm...or in my nightmares."

"Right..." Bill said, "Nothing worse than my nightmares about my brother either..."

"I can't believe you handed me a short straw Eddie! You should be glad we aren't measuring dick sizes..." Richie groaned. And really, he couldn't believe it. Because, against all odds, he was following Bill Denbrough into an evil, haunted house to fight a fucking clown. Bill Denbrough. And a fucking clown! He hated clowns! If they were in a movie, he would've called his character a goddamn idiot.

"Shut-up Richie!" Eddie spat in his high squeaky voice. He looked no more happy to end up with a short straw himself. Nor did Mike.

"I'd have to agree...Richie. Beep-beep," Mike said. Richie groaned, then started to follow Bill and Mike as they moved slowly through the house's main hallway, but he stopped short when his eye was drawn to something. A piece of paper, in the remains of what appeared to be a tree that had grown in through a window. It was in a room that might have been a parlor once. Richie hesitated, causing Eddie to stop short behind him, then moved toward the paper. He felt it calling to him. The goddamn paper. This house was going to kill him.

"Richie no! You're going the wrong way!" Eddie called. Richie ignored this shrill, and moved toward the paper, feeling a mix of terror and disbelief. Because it couldn't be. It just couldn't be. He wasn't missing...not yet anyway...but the paper, the paper he reached out and grabbed...it was him. An image of him, with the clear name, *Richard Tozier*, printed beneath it. He could see his big, round glasses, his thick lips, oversized compared to his skinny nose, and his bangs that slipped down into his eyes when he sweated or his hair got wet.

"Guys!" Richie started, starting to shake as he held the paper, "Guys... It says I'm missing...I'm lost! I'm not missing! I'm not!"

"Richie!" Bill called, stepping back from the hallway toward Richie, "You're not missing..."

"No..." Richie gulped, then started reading the paper, "Police department, city of Derry, that's my shirt, that's my hair, that my face!" Richie looked over the paper again, at his image, scared and alone and missing, left by his friends...especially...

"Bill Denbrough..." a voice, from who the fuck knows where, whispered in his ear, "That son of a bitch..."

"Richie! It's not real!" Bill called. He took a step toward Richie, but Richie jerked away from him.

"That's my name, that's my age, that's the date!"

"That son of a bitch...he just wants you to tough it out..." the voice whispered, then continued, "He doesn't really care about you...he just wants to use you, Richie. To use you...just like he did last summer..." though creepy as shit, the voice had a good point, and Richie, now gave the approaching Bill a cold, angry glare, and pulled away from him again. Richie was on the verge of cursing him out, when a small, pale hand gripped his wrist. Richie felt the paper of his image ripped away, then turned to see Eddie was holding it.

"Look at me, Richie!" Eddie squeaked. He threw the paper on the ground, then grabbed Richie's other wrist, looking him in the eye, "That...it's not real. It's playing tricks on you. The clown is just trying to scare you Richie..."

"I...I..." Richie felt himself starting to calm down, but then, the voice returned.

"What's wrong Richie...you don't have an accent for this? Some stupid phrase you could use, to tell Bill or Eddie off? He-he...you're a lot weaker than before, boy..." the voice whispered, then faded. It was only then that Richie recognized that it had to be the clown whispering to him.

"Shit..." Richie muttered, then stamped on the paper on the ground and signaled forward, "Stupid clown...let's go..."

"Hmph...Richie..." Bill muttered, then, he, Richie and Eddie turned to Mike, then upward, to the sound of somebody, a girl probably, saying something. A quiet call, like she was confused and trapped somewhere...

"I think...that's one of the missing girls..." Bill said, starting forward. Eddie hesitated, and Richie put an arm around him as they walked.

"Come on, Eds, let's get a move on, wot-wot...Wouldn't want to be left behind, cheerio, and all that..." Richie switched to a British accent he knew was no good. He and Eddie moved back to the main hallway, where Bill and Mike at the bottom of the main steps looking around and trying to determine where the voice was coming from, "Would be a shame to be left in an old scary manor, wot-wot..."

"Beep-beep man! Is this a record for you?" Bill spat. Richie stuck out his tongue, and Mike pinched his forehead.

"What have I got myself into..." Mike muttered. Richie was about to start his probably inappropriate Afro-American Jim accent when Eddie pushed past him and pointed.

"We have to go upstairs! Whatever it is, it's upstairs." The girl called out again, saying something that to Richie sounded an awful lot like a cry for help, then fell silent. Mike looked up the stairs, then back at Eddie.

"Why?" Mike asked. Bill held up a hand.

"Eddie's got a knack for directions. He's not led us wrong, as long as he feels where he's going."

"Yeah, Stan and I think he's got a magnet in the gut. It gave him diabetes, but it also made him a human compass," Richie agreed.

"Whatever Richie. I just know we need to go upstairs..." Eddie said. Mike rolled his eyes, then moved with Bill up the steps. Richie and Eddie followed, and each one creaked loudly, creating more stress and terror in the boy, but, after fifteen...or maybe fifty, they were on the second floor and moving to a hallway which ended in what was probably a bedroom. The door was partly open, and there, on the

edge of his vision, Richie would've sworn he'd seen Betty Ripsom's face dragged across the wooden floor. Swallowing terror, he followed Mike and Bill toward the doorway, and they opened the door to reveal a mostly empty room with old, partially torn mattress was against one wall. Behind the group, down the hallway, was another room, one that was very dark, and had a rather cold breeze coming from it.

"In there..." Eddie said. Bill nodded, then stepped into the room slowly, his eyes fixed on the horrible mattress. Richie could've guess a few things done on that mattress, and might've cracked a joke about it...if he wasn't terrified out of his mind. Mike went through the door's threshold slowly, then just before Richie could follow, he felt something cold tie his stomach in a knot, and slowly turned around to see that the door of the far room was now swinging open slowly. Eddie, behind Richie, turned around too and quickly opened his fanny pack to pull out inhaler. Richie wasn't totally clear on what the thing actually did, but Richie assumed it gave Eddie more oxygen to prevent his diabetes from killing him. Or maybe it just made the whiney sick boy calm down some. It didn't seem to be doing anything at that moment, as Eddie was taking a long puff and still breathing very heavily.

"Guys..." Eddie started, "What is..." There was a loud giggle that then turned to a growl and suddenly, something enormous, fury, and with huge teeth and claws burst through the doorway.

"You got to be kidding me..." Eddie grumbled.

"Shit Eddie!" Richie yelled, "I thought you were scared of Lepers or something?"

"Werewolves...huh*...are...are...a disease...puff*...tur...tur...huh*... turned into a monster!" Eddie struggled out through increasingly fast breathes and inhaler puffs. He took another hit of the inhaler, but to little effect. The werewolf stepped down the hallway slowly, stretching out its arms and shaking its fur before letting out a long, loud howl. It turned its snout to Eddie and bared its long, sharp fangs, then started bounding toward him. Richie stumbled backward and in a moment had fallen into the bedroom and onto the hard, wooden floor. Bill and Mike grabbed his shoulders, and sat him up to

see the door of the bedroom shut suddenly. They could only hear the sound of Eddie screaming as Bill and Mike dropped Richie and rushed to grab the doorknob. The frantic shaking yielded nothing, and Richie stood as he heard the sound of Eddie's cries of *guys, guys*, increasing in volume, then came a loud crash, like part of the house was falling in on itself.

"Eddie!" Richie yelled, rushing to the door and banging on it, "Eddie! Eddie!" Richie stumbled back, trying not to lose it. Eddie...Eddie couldn't be dead. Maybe it was another trick. But, if it wasn't Eddie... the werewolf...Richie refused to let his mind think about what might have happened to him. Eddie was his best friend...especially since Bill had...Eddie couldn't be killed. Not by the fucking clown or werewolf or whatever it was. There had to be...

"Richie!" Eddie's voice came from somewhere in the room. Behind him. Richie turned, and Mike put a hand on his shoulder.

"Step back, Richie, I'll try to kick it open!" Mike said. Richie started away from him, moving toward the voice which repeated itself.

"Hey, Richie!" Eddie said again. Richie turned to see another door, a door out of the bedroom that opened slowly, and he caught a glimpse of Eddie moving behind a cupboard.

"Eddie! What the hell, man? We...I though you were really hurt!" Richie trailed off and followed the boy into the next room...and then, a flashing light came on, and Richie knew immediately he'd made a mistake. All around him...were fucking clowns.

They weren't as bad as real clowns. They were dolls, of all many of sizes and shapes, but all of them had the same wild red hair, the bald head and white, powdered face, and a big red nose Richie would've liked to rip off of every one he saw. Richie sighed, then was about to turn around when the door to this side room slammed shut.

"Oh, boy..." Richie muttered, then looked back to see, in the far corner of the room, was a coffin. A boy sized coffin. A Richie sized coffin. Richie, pulled forward by morbid and frankly terrifying curiosity, moved slowly toward the box. It was a nice wood, and was a little low to the ground. Richie would be able to look directly into

it. *That's the fucking point, you idiot!* he thought, then, very slowly, he reached out, and lifted the coffin's side open. And inside...was him. A doll of him, partially eaten by maggot, and more disgusting than terrifying.

"Gross..." Richie muttered. Then, his eyes was draw down the dead doll boy's body. Down, past his chest and his poorly fitting suit, to his pants. Because right down there, gripping doll boy's crotch, was a hand. A hand that squeeze hard, which Richie felt, and his hand flew down, but felt only his own shorts back from. Then, Richie went to the other side of the coffin and lifted it, and there, crouched around Richie's legs and with that hand on him, was Bill.

"I want to try something Richie. But don't tell anyone about it..." Bill said. Then, he started to undo the pants. Richie felt his own zipper and button coming undone, and started to stumble back, crying out.

"No! Stop, Bill! Stop!" Richie cried. Bill suddenly jumped up and landed next to the coffin, slowly walking toward Richie, smiling evilly. Richie could see his half decayed doll form rise up to, and smile in something he recognized as pleasure and excitement.

"I promise...I won't tell...and if somebody finds out...I won't turn on you...I won't call you, faggot boy...I won't join in with the others in beating and kicking you like the little bitch you are!"

"Bill! You...you..." Richie tried to do something. Cuss him out, use an accent, mock how he sometimes spoke overly eloquently. But...all Richie could do was choke out a sob, then he felt tears form and start to slip down his face.

"Bill...why...I...I thought we were..." Richie felt his nose filling, and sniffed hard and wiped his eyes. Bill's smile faded, then he clenched a fist.

"I need you scared, Richie. I need fear...not that sadness and those feeble tears..."

"Wh...What?" Richie struggled out through his unsteady breathes, trying to keep his vision clear of the rising water in his eyes. Bill's face shook, then each arm stretched out in a terrible breaking sound.

His legs did the same, and then he grabbed his head, and, making loud cracks, turned it all the way around. Richie watched in horror as the head kept turning, and by the time it got back around, it was white, powdered, with red hair and that stupid, nose.

"Beep-beep, Richie..." the clown said, then started to do a horrible dance, like it was on puppet strings but the head was stuck in place and wouldn't move no matter how hard you jerked the body. Richie stepped back, trying to move away from the thing, but he just wasn't as scared. His mind was too busy flashing through the memories of last summer. Trying not to cry again, he backed up slowly to the shut door, where he could hear Mike and Bill fighting with the handle. Then, the clown was on him, swinging out a hand, straight for Richie's face. The boy jerked aside, into a corner he knew there was no escape from. The hand smashed through the door beside him, then the clown turned to him with a horrible, evil smile.

"Come on, Richie...let's play...and maybe float...we all...huh?" The clown, interrupted, turned back to its hand, which was still through the door. Richie watched as the clown pulled, then the hand seemed to be pulled back, bringing the creature to the doorway. Richie looked at the increasingly stupid and silly looking clown struggling to get its hand free, then had an idea. Dolls, some dolls anyway, were made of porcelain, or something glass-like, right? He really hoped one of these clown dolls was, and grabbed the legs of a hefty one, with a sad, crying face and a tear painted badly on one cheek, raised it in the air, and brought it down on the evil clown. Though it seemed a bit light for Richie, the doll was apparently indeed made of porcelain, as it smashed into the head of the clown with a thud, broke against the creature, and left a bit gash on its head. The clown stumbled back, then Richie ripped open the door and saw Mike and Bill standing there, holding a severed clown hand.

"Motherf..."

Mike didn't hear the rest, because the hand, the severed hand with the white, frilly glove leading to a bloody stump, suddenly came to life from their fingers and covered Richie's mouth. The boy screamed through the hand, and Mike grabbed it to try and get it off, but Richie took off running, yelling and fighting against the horrible, severed thing. Bill moved toward him, but Richie was already out of

the room, and unsurprising, the door slammed behind him. Mike turned around and did his best to shut the door to the side room, though, it did little good, as the mattress in the middle of the bedroom started to whine and creak, and soon another of the white gloved hands burst from a rip in the seams.

"Oh, come on," Mike said grumpily. Bill grabbed him and turned him around to see that the door Richie had run out of had multiplied. By three. Each door looked exactly the same, except that each something written in blood across it. The one on the far left said *Not Scary at All*, the middle said, *Scary*, and the last one said, *Very Scary*.

"Mike, let's try that one..." Bill pointed, and Mike did too, but they were facing opposite ways. Bill was facing the *Not Scary*, while Mike was facing *Very Scary*, "Mike, why would you..."

"It's a trick. And the door is where its suppose to be! I bet there's like half a girl hanging in that door..." Mike said. Bill looked him over, then at the *Very Scary* door.

"But, the werewolf is probably there...with...Eddie..." There was the sound of a loud rip, and both turned to see that the clown was halfway out of mattress, a bloody stump where his right arm should've been. They looked at each other, then Mike pointed at the middle.

"Compromise!" He yelled. Bill nodded and rushed to the door, flung it open, and found it led to a long, narrow hallway that ended in a large window that illuminated the hallway with a low, ugly yellow light. They both rushed through it, then there was the sound of something breaking, as if something was shifting the entire house. Mike felt himself off balance, and started to fall forward. Bill started stumbling as well, then grabbed onto a column on the side of the room. Mike grabbed the other side, then, the yellow light became brighter, and darkened with redder and orange hues and finally the house seemed to shift entirely onto its side, and both Bill and Mike were hanging from the columns.

"This is the goddamn compromise..." Bill muttered. Mike looked at him, then back at the window, which burst from the heat, and soon was engulfed in flames. Flames that were traveling up toward them.

Mike looked into it and saw his nightmare. The fire, the fire that had killed his father, scared his grandfather, burned down his slaughterhouse and nearly killed him that night, it was coming for him again. He had joined this group because he was running from Henry Bowers, and he had been scared by the clown using a burning building before. Now, he was going to die from that same stupid clown because he let a couple of white boys convince him to go in a haunted, evil house. For Stanley Uris, maybe...for this Bill Denbrough...he didn't think so...

"Mike!" Bill said, looking at him, "Mike, the house can't be sideways, this is a trick!"

"I know. It still scares the shit out of me!" Mike yelled. Bill looked him over, then both heard the sound of old gears turning, except it was too fast and making the sound of something being torn apart. Mike and Bill looked down to see a meat grinder now in the middle of the flames, eating up furniture and debris falling from the houses new angle.

"Oh shit! Oh my god, oh, I'm gonna, die!" Bill said, now pulling his legs in, "I'm sorry, Mike! I'm sorry, Gerogie...Richie..I'm...I..." Mike looked at him, then down at the machine. It wasn't right. The grinder had gears, almost like a clock, a lot of them, moving fast, but that wouldn't grind meat. He worked on his grandfather's farm and sold meat to a butch for god's sakes. But, why would the grinder look so wrong if it was going to kill them...unless, it was Bill's fear, like the fire was for Mike.

"Bill! It's not real!"

"I know, I just told you that!"

"But the grinder! I know what a grinder looks like! You don't! It looks like what you think it does, but, its just a trick! We have to let go, or we'll be caught by it!"

"What? Let go?" Bill looked down, then back at Mike, "Okay...okay, I trust you. But, if I get grinded up, I'm going to be a really racist ghost!" Mike let out a loud laugh, a laugh he could barely control, then looked down to see the grinder slowing down, and the flames

weakening. *It's working already.*

"Okay, ready? One..." Mike started. Bill joined in with *two*, then, they both screamed *three*, and dropped. Mike felt the sensation of flying, then sat down hard onto wood floor. No fire, not grinder. Just dusty wood floor, on the steps leading down toward a dining room. Bill had landed there too, and was rubbing his bum when they heard a scream. Really, a set of screams. Bill jumped to his feet and ran down the stairs, and soon they were in another hallway—*why is this house nothing but evil looking hallways*—that led to a kitchen. And both of them could see the vague outline of Eddie and Richie, drawing back from the werewolf, which was stepping slowly toward the two.

"Wah! Ah!" Eddie screamed. He was about in the worse shape he'd ever been in. And he was a freaking diabetic. With diabetes-related asthma. And diabetes-related gastro-intestinal problems. And diabetes-related early onset heart disease. Hell, it seemed like his diabetes tried to kill him every day, but he'd never felt closer to death that with a werewolf stepping toward him with its teeth bared.

"Eddie! You got to get up! You got to run!" Richie yelled in his ear. *Run? I don't think I can even move at all!* Eddie thought, looking at his right arm. It was broken, like really broken. As in, horror movie broken, because his hand was bent a different direction than the rest of his arm. And that was the least of his worries, wasn't it? The werewolf let out another howl, and Eddie thought he was going to piss himself, then Richie jumped to his feet and put out his arms.

"Go away! Leave me friend alone!" Richie yelled. The werewolf looked at him, and snorted.

"Richie, no!" Eddie said, trying to signal him away. He was weak. And sickly. Eddie should've probably died years ago. But...he didn't even what to imagine Richie dying, especially not to save him. Then again, he really wasn't in any position to turn Richie's help down, was he? He'd tried to run from the werewolf earlier, but passed out when the creature grabbed his arm and roared at him. Which led to him falling back, crashing through the floor, smashing into a table and breaking his arm in two. He was doing great, wasn't he? Sure had his directions right, going upstairs for all that mess...

"Go away!" Richie said again. The werewolf let out a low growl, then both turned to the sound of Mike and Bill rushing toward them.

"Eddie!" Bill yelled. The werewolf let out a howl, then Bill and Mike started to stumble and struggled to move. As if they were both old drunks, like that old man who wandered his street sometimes at night and whistled for his mother. She would inevitably yell profanities back at him about staying away from her son. Then again, maybe it wasn't the boys, but the hallway that was drunk, because it seemed to Eddie that floor and the doorway were moving and keeping Mike and Bill from getting a good footing. Richie watched them a moment, then looked back at the werewolf, appearing a great deal less sure about himself, but he switched to one of Eddie's least favorite Richie accents...Southern-bell Delilah.

"Oh my, now Snarly, why don't you take that pretty face of yours with them great, big teeth and just get on! Get on, I say!" Richie said in as high and delicate a voice he could muster. Which was neither all that high, nor all that delicate. The creature let out a snort, then raised an arm.

"Richie...that voice sucked..." the werewolf said, then swiped at the boy, sending him careening through the kitchen. He crashed through a nearby screen door and rolled out of the house, leaving Eddie with nothing between him and the werewolf. He glanced back at the still struggling Mike and Bill and gulped hard.

"Hey Eddie...you ready...to take your pill?" the werewolf growled out to him, then, opened a long, clawed hand and gripped Eddie's shoulder, "I've got a disease you won't recover from, Eds..." the werewolf said, leaning forward and sniffing right at Eddie's neck, right where werewolves bite, or at least, Eddie assumed so. He cowered and whimpered as the creature opened its mouth to reveal not just one set of sharp, long white fangs, but two, then three sets. Eddie thought he saw something else too, some light that was bright and evil and ominous deep in the throat of the creature. Something that may have been called...*deadlights*...

As Eddie stared, in horror, in terror at the werewolf, he thought he should at least stop his uncontrollable wheezing, and reached his unbroken hand down to his fanny pack, unzipped it, and grabbed his

inhaler. He picked it up slowly, but, instead of putting it in his mouth, something compelled him to lean forward and put it right into the mouth of the creature. The mouth was huge and the snout was not really shaped correctly to take in an inhaler, but, strangely enough, the werewolf clamped down on the thing. The creature, still in Eddie's face, looked at boy in confusion, then at the thing in its mouth, letting out a small snort. Eddie, summoning all the power left in his unbroken hand, swung down as hard as he could at his inhaler and gave the creature a great burst of the medicine. It reeled back, coughing and spitting out the device and Eddie began to laugh again. Because it was so stupid. The werewolf took a hit of his asthma inhaler. Which meant, his lungs were clearing up. *Hope you breath better wolfie!* Eddie thought. Then, the werewolf did take a deep breath and sighed, almost like he was relieved.

"Thanks...Eds..." it said, giving Eddie a dark grin.

"I'm so dead..." Eddie muttered. He drew back as the werewolf opened its mouth, was about to clamp down on the boy, then, he saw a stake driven straight through its head. Eddie glanced up to see Beverly was holding the stake, driving it straight through the skull of the creature. It let out a low roar, then Eddie could see the muscular Ben behind her, also holding the same type of stake. And behind them, standing on the edge of the doorway, half in the house and halfway toward taking off running, was Stan, and even he was holding one of these long sharp tools. Richie shoved past him, still seeming somewhat dazed, started toward Eddie, past the Beverly struggling with the impaled werewolf, and gripped the boy's shoulders.

"Eds I got to break your arm back into place..."

"What? No, I..." Richie gripped the wrist and jerked it before Eddie could say anything more, making a loud crunch that caused Eddie to scream loudly. The pain was horrible when he jerked it, but, now that it was back in place, it hurt a lot less, and also made him feel less nauseated by his own hand. Though, he started to feel lightheaded. He blinked a few times, and saw Beverly struggling to subdue the werewolf with the stake as he drifted toward passing out.

"Hold it still, Bev!" Ben yelled, raising his stake as well, "Let me help!"

Eddie saw him raise and drive down the point, then his vision slipped to black.

Stan didn't really know what he was doing there. Because this wasn't him. He was fighting an evil clown, the same clown who had pretended to be a misshapen woman from his father's worst painting. And he was fighting it in an old abandoned house full of dirt and grime and filth. Because Bill wanted revenge for his brother who was captured and killed by this thing the year before. This definitely was not him.

And that was why he did not want to get any closer to...what could only be described as a horribly human-like dog monster. Werewolves were not real. Paintings did not come to life. And clowns did not murder children. He wished he could believe that. But instead, he was standing, in one of his favorite button ups and slacks, watching Beverly and Ben stab a werewolf.

Stan took a deep breath and tried to think about what he'd do when they finally left that house. And finished killing the evil clown. Assuming he didn't piss himself and need a shower, Stan would probably prefer to switch genres, go watch something like *Dirty Dancing* or *Coming to America*, both of which he'd seen numerous times. The romantic comedy was his favorite, but, of course, Richie and Bill loved stupid horror movies, and Eddie always seemed like more of an action flick guy. Which probably explained why he was here, watching a girl in a cute sky and cloud dress and a handsome, hulky boy stab a werewolf. Instead Stan getting to dance in a low moonlight with a pretty girl. *Or a pretty guy, but I can't admit that...* Stan sighed, and leaned on the stake, and wished, for just a moment, that he wasn't messed up like that...that he could think about the likes of Bill and Eddie and Mike there without his mind wandering down to their...

"Stan!" Beverly roared. Stan was snapped back to reality and looked at the girl, who's formerly well-manicured hair and nice dressed were being ruined by the creature she was impaling.

"Huh? What?"

"The stake, you idiot!" Beverly cried. She looked down and slammed

a heavy foot on the werewolf's snout, "You need to stab it! If we all stab it, the thing will die! Werewolves are weak to bronze, so this should work! Just assume there is bronze in the stake..." Stan started to move forward, very slowly, to the writhing creature, then paused and looked up at Beverly.

"Bronze? Who told you that? Werewolves are killed by silver," Stan said. The writhing creature suddenly stopped, and Beverly looked down at the thing in horror.

"Shit...I wish you hadn't told her that..." Ben muttered. Stan could see the werewolf turn its head, and its lip curled slightly...into a *smile*.

"Beverly!" This came from Bill, who, with Mike, seemed to have made it down the wiggling hallway to get behind the thing. Stan looked over the two, and reflected for just a second how nice it would've been to be grabbed and rescued by those two boys...like Richie did to Eddie. Then again...

"Watch out!" Ben yelled. The big boy was flung back, then the werewolf flung Beverly back as well. The two of them crashed into an ancient cupboard together. The creature, obviously tired of the wolf game, started to shake its head, and with a few jerky thrusts, had shifted back to the evil looking clown. Then, in a smooth move, it reached behind it, drew out the two stakes, and flung them, one flew sideways to smack into Bill and Mike's guts, knocking them down though, thankfully, not ripping open their abdomens. The other, going point first, nearly took off Richie's head, and crashed into an old pantry. The boy flinched, and collapsed to the ground, bringing the wounded Eddie down with him. The clown stood up slowly, cracked its neck, then turned to the last Loser standing, Stan, a big smile on his face.

"Hey Stan the Man...sissy boy...I bet you'd like a balloon..." Stan started to stumble backward, but stopped so he wouldn't fall out of the house. He couldn't abandon his friends, as much as he wanted to take off running.

"That's right Stan. No need to leave...it's fun to float...we all float down there..." the clown snapped, and a balloon appeared. A

friendly, unthreatening balloon that slowly floated toward Stan. The balloon started to sound like it was straining, like it was getting too full, and it was almost touching Stan's face when it suddenly burst, with the loudest scream Stan had ever heard. The scream came with saliva, with bad breath, but it also came with something else. Gusts, bursts of wind...like...like a great evil bird. But Stan didn't fear birds. No, he loved birds, so that meant it had to be another flying creature. A creature he hated, that never, ever should've had the ability to fly.

"No...no..." Stan cowered from the enormous bat flapping over him. Except, this was the worst type of bat Stan could have ever imagined; huge, ugly fangs that stretched down to almost its chin, long, horribly misshapen claws for feet; dark, bugged out eyes; and big, black wings that slapped the air with quick, harsh flaps.

"Come on Stan...you don't want to float? How about we fly?"

"No, stop, please!" Stan was now almost in a ball, and he felt a warm liquid pooling around his crotch. The bat drew itself up, and opened its mouth to reveal numerous rows of the horrible teeth, but then it crashed to the ground. Stan, trying to control his shaking legs and hands, stood up and saw the bat flapping one wing on the ground, while the other had a stake in it. A stake, being driven in by Mike.

"Leave...him...alone!" Mike roared. The bat let out a whimper, then drew in one wing, and turned its body to orient toward Stan. The thing roared again, but, Stan felt a new conviction. He had to help Mike. He had to help Mike. He *had* to help Mike.

"Die bat!" Stan cried, snatching up the last stake and with an intense thrust, impaled the other wing. The clown-bat was now screaming, swinging both its wings against the stakes, crying in pain, and after a few moments, the wings ripped in bloody messes and the animal writhed and wiggled until it was racing away, down toward what looked to Stan like a cellar. Bill, who was dusting himself off, seemed to turn and chase after the thing. Stan watched him a moment, then his bravery faltered and he felt the formerly warm liquid on his pants cooling to a soggy mess. Stan stumbled backward, out of the house, then, he felt Mike grab his arm and lead him out to the lawn and their bikes, the others close behind him.

"Ben! Help me with Eddie! He's out cold!" Richie said, trying to drag Eddie out of the front door of the Neibolt house. Ben turned and nodded back to the boy.

"I've got him!" Ben, Big Ben as he was sometimes known, more for his great arms and big muscles than from any childish insult, gladly swept up the poor, sickly child and was carrying almost by himself when the Losers exited the house. Ben...well...he had to admit it was a surprise to be there and a surprise to be escaping. It was only his first year in Derry. And he'd meet some of these boys before, shoving Henry Bowers away when the boy tried to give Eddie a wedgie or Richie an overly tight noggie. He'd also once see Mike fleeing the Henry and his boys and tried to intervene but was too slow. Not until the boys had tried to cut a hole in Bill's gut had Ben finally been able to teach the bullies a lesson. He'd kicked Bower's man Vic, off a bridge and his other man, Belch, so hard in the nuts that he'd been unable to chase Bill or Ben. And soon, the two had escaped Bowers and Patrick Hockstetter before the latter had gone missing. But, Ben was probably there, more than anything else, for Beverly. And Ben looked back to make sure she was out of the house before he was.

Beverly...that beautiful, strong, brave girl who sat in front of him in English, who would go off on the other girls for their comments and attitudes with vulgar words and gestures, who was to Ben like a wonderful, shining light in the other dark and dreary Derry, Maine. He'd wrestled, a lot, with the idea of asking her out. Sure, he was a handsome and big boy, sure, but that didn't mean that the girl he liked would like him, especially a badass, independent girl like Bevie. And further, Ben didn't believe the slut rumors, nor the rumors about why her mother and her had come to Derry without a father. What would Beverly have thought of a new, handsome jock kid asking her out?

And then...after rescuing Bill, she was there, trying to clean his wound from tumbling with Bill down a hill toward the quarry. She remembered him, mentioned that he had a *New Kids on the Block* notebook that Ben was only somewhat embarrassed by, and Ben knew he was in the group, as much to protect Beverly as anything else.

Then...the rock fight with the bullies, Mike and Stan's showing them

history books, the projector coming to life, and then, there they were in the Neibolt street house. And now, they seemed to have just barely escaped. The group, Stan, Mike, Richie, Beverly, and Ben, still holding Eddie, were panting and groaning in pain as they stood among the bikes outside of the fence of the home. Then, Bill came out last, looking over the wounded and exhausted Losers, then had the gall to turn around and signal back inside.

"Guys! I saw the well. And we hurt it! We all did!" Bill said, pointing back to the house, which only led the Losers to shy further away from it, "And if we come back, with enough equipment, we can kill it! We have to work together!"

"Work together? Come back?" Richie, one hand now on the unconscious Eddie, raised his other index finger accusingly at Bill, "Bill, that thing nearly killed us, all of us! Eddie's arm was fucking snapped in half. I was nearly eaten by a clown, then, I was nearly eaten when that clown turned into a werewolf, only to watch Stan be nearly eaten by a god-damned giant bat! And..." Richie's glare grew cold, like he was remember something that made him angry, "And...I was reminded by that clown that I don't really like you. So I don't really think we should be listening to blubbering Bill here!" Richie spat. Bill put a hand to his head and sighed.

"Jesus...of course the clown would make that a thing with you, wouldn't it? Richie, I said I was sorry, I've tried to make it up a thousand times!"

"And it could take a thousand more! I don't forgive you Bill!" Richie shouted at him. Bill groaned, then, Mike stepped forward.

"Maybe...maybe we're not cut out for this...we're just kids. We just got through freshman year..."

"And?" Beverly spoke up, her hands on her hips, "We're kids, and we're doing something. No one else will, we all know that..."

"Do we?" Richie challenged, then, he trailed off and looked at Eddie, who was coming back to consciousness.

"What...what happened?"

"A clown-werewolf broke your fucking arm by throwing you through a hole in the floor Eddie!" Richie said. Beverly rolled her eyes and looked at Mike, who now had his arms crossed grumpily.

"Mike, your father's history books. They showed you...that thing will come back every 27 years!"

"Yeah. Fine. I'll be forty, I'll be in an apartment somewhere in New York, and I won't give a god-damn fuck," Mike said with irritation. Bill was about to speak, when Stan cleared his throat.

"We...I need to go home..." Stan muttered, his hands down around his crotch, covering what to Ben looked like urine, "And...we can't do this again. No next time!"

"Stan's right! You're insane Bill!" Richie said, signaling to Stan's wet pants with a jerk of his hand, "Look at this motherfucker! He's got piss dripping down his leg because a giant bat nearly ate his face off! And you want to come back? Your brother's dead, Bill and he's not coming back! This won't fix it!" This seemed to set off Bill, who walked up to Richie and looked him dead in the eye.

"Take that back, Richie..." Bill said, his face now cold. Richie and him were now inches from each other, but neither backed off.

"What are you going to do about it, Bill?" Richie started, "He's dead. Georgie is dead. And nothing you do could ever bring him..." Richie didn't get to finish, because Bill socked him in the face, sending him sprawling to the ground. Richie, on the ground, rolled for a moment, then jumped to his feet and rushed at Bill, slamming into him. The two shoved at each other until Stan and Mike grabbed Richie's arms and Beverly grabbed Bill's arm. Ben wanted to step in and intervene, but, holding the wounded Eddie, he hesitated to move too much.

"Stop! Stop, both of you!" Beverly yelled, pulling on Bill's arm, "This is what it wants! We hurt it together! But if we separate..."

"If we separate, maybe we don't die!" Richie spat back, "I don't want to be part of this fucking Loser club anymore! Let's go Eds, you can ride in there..." Richie pointed to the basket on Mike's bike, "I'm borrowing this, home-school boy..." Mike sighed, then shrugged.

"Alright, trash-mouth. Guess I'll just borrow yours then..." Mike grumbled.

"No...I can take you home..." Stan muttered, "Get on my bike... behind me. If...its...okay...with you."

"Fine then. But I'll need my bike back, Richie!" Mike slowly got onto Stan's bike seat, and soon, the two of them took off in the direction of Mike's farm. Ben very carefully put the wounded Eddie in Mike's basket, then he and Eddie rode off the opposite way, toward Eddie's house. Soon, it was Bill, Beverly and Ben left.

"Ben, what are you going to do?" Beverly asked.

"Um..." Ben hesitated, trying to decide between his self-preservation and his desire to procreate with her in his answer, "I think that maybe...I'll..."

"It doesn't matter. The three of us alone aren't strong enough..." Bill said. This came almost as if someone, or something far above Bill was speaking through him. The boy turned away from Ben and Beverly and sighed, "If we grow too far apart, all of us...then it will be able to pick us off one by one..." Bill sighed, and turned from the group, "I failed Georgie...I don't think I can kill it..." Ben looked at Bill, rubbing a hand on one of his biceps. He just then noticed Beverly might find that suggestive or grotesque, and dropped it.

"Well, then maybe we shouldn't let the group get too far apart..." Ben offered.

"How...they won't listen to me?" Bill muttered. Ben shrugged, but Beverly seemed to embrace this idea.

"No, Ben's right. We just need to keep in enough contact with each other to keep the group together. All seven. Mike and Stan will be together, and so will Eddie and Richie. If we can get one of each of them to spend time with one of us three, the group might hold enough," Bill glanced down, then looked back at Beverly.

"Great idea, Bevie. I'll just go beg Richie to hang out with me. That's going so well..."

"No, you idiot..." Beverly said, hands on her hips, "You try to get to Stan. Stan is irritated at you, and what was in there literally scared the piss out of him. But he doesn't hate you, and you two have know each other since kindergarten, right?" Bill nodded, then she looked at Ben, "Ben, you try and get Richie. Play games with him or something...Trashmouth has tried to start shit with everyone but you, so we should use that."

"Okay. I'll try..." Ben said. Bill crossed his arms.

"See if you can get Eddie too, though I doubt his mother will let him outside the house for the next three weeks. Bevie, you try for Mike. He might be willing to at least talk to you, since you helped save him in the rock-fight..."

"Right...I'll try..." Beverly said, "But, if any of us, any of the losers are taken, we've got to get everyone back together. We've got to find a way. Otherwise...one of us might die. Like really die..." Both boys bobbed their heads in support, then Ben cleared his throat.

"Sounds good to me..." Ben pointed down Neibolt street, back toward downtown Derry, "Wanna go get milkshakes?" Ben knew it sounded stupid as soon as it came out of his mouth, and also knew any chance of getting with Beverly was contingent on her not picking Bill over him, which meant bringing Bill on the date was also stupid. But, Beverly let out a long, loud laugh, then put an arm around Bill and Ben and pull them close.

"That sounds wonderful boys. Let's go...and I'll let you all fight over which one of you will pay for me..." Ben smiled, then, something, something small felt like it was reconnected in the losers.

3. Chapter 2: Summer Days, 1989

No...no...they're stronger than they were before! The changes I made were supposed to break up the Loser's Club, not make it stronger! It murmurs, clicking its tongue, then turning its attention back to you, the reader, No matter though. I've got a special surprise for Bill and his friends. I'm not as defeated as they think...he-he-he. And this time Bill, nor Richie, nor any of that stupid Loser's Club will be able to escape the deadlights this time...he-he-he-he!

In the two weeks since the incident at Neibolt street, Mike, returned by Stan to his grandfather's farm, tried to go back to life as it had been before. Tending to flocks of sheep, feeding pigs and letting the animals in and out of their pens, keeping foxes and dogs out of the hen house. But, he couldn't exactly go back to before because...he felt empty. Like there was a void that he couldn't quite put his finger on. He felt like something really important in his life was missing, and he didn't know what it was or how to fix it. When he'd been at Neibolt, he'd endured a lot of different feelings and emotions, especially fear and anger, but now...he was just numb. It kept Mike from saying more than a few words during dinner with his mother. It kept Mike from crying or even flinching in response to his grandfather's unprovoked bursts of anger. And, it took away his normal hesitation and dislike of killing animals. Which was why he was suddenly perfectly willing to take his captive bolt pistol and blow a hole into the skull of an unsuspecting ewe. Had Mike had a better understanding of psychology, he might've considered himself to be suffering the effects of emotional shock...though he had no grasp of this, and considered his lack of feelings as a void.

After the many days of this monotonous farm work, their family and farm hands had gathered the meat of a few of the ewes they'd killed, and Mike was in the midst of wrapping some to take to the butcher, preparing to put them in his bike, when he recalled that Richie had borrowed it and never returned it. Mike sighed in irritation at the uncouth boy and his failure to keep his promise, paused his work gathering meat, and went out from the cold house. He'd have to try to explain all this to his grandfather. He really hoped he wouldn't have to carry the meat all the way to the butcher, and prayed for a

miracle to save him when he heard his name called.

"Mike!" the boy turned around, and saw Stan moving up the hill toward his farm slowly, pushing Mike's bike. And something in Mike clicked. The emptiness...it wasn't gone, exactly. But it wasn't as deep either. The void was beginning to fade. Mike's lips slipped into a smile at seeing the other boy's face.

"Stan..." Mike said. Stan paused a moment, and Mike could see the wind blowing his curls around his face. The sun was making his brown-blond hair particularly bright, and Stan was in his usual dapper clothing, a nice, neat white and blue polo shirt with khaki shorts and a tight belt that kept it in place.

"Mike..." Stan's face seemed to light up some too, and the boy pushed the bike over to Mike's side, "Richie...kept making excuses, so I just went over, took it from him and rode it out here..."

"I...thanks..." Mike said, taking the handles. Stan stood there, his hands at his sides, his head cocked slightly. Mike felt like he needed to say something, but, what was there to say?

"I...uh...well..."

"I guess I'll see you around..." Stan said, his smile fading. Mike's smile started to slip too and he sighed. The void was coming back, wasn't it?

"Yeah...thanks...for the bike..." Mike started, then he looked at his bike, then he looked back at Stan dubiously, "Wait, you rode up here? On this bike? How are you going home?" Stan turned his head, looked around, then shrugged.

"I...I guess I didn't really think of that. I don't know..." Stan said, then he looked at the sky again, "It's a nice day though. Not too buggy. I could probably walk home..."

"You wanna walk all that way?" Mike asked, then, he looked at the bike and smiled, "Here, come on. I got to deliver some meat to the butcher anyway. We'll ride into town together..." Stan smiled at this, and Mike felt the void starting to fade again as he led the bike and

the boy over to the cold house. Stan hesitated on going in, but Mike grabbed his arm and pulled him, then started the Jewish boy to work by handing him the meat to load into the bike's basket.

"Wow...this seems like a lot..." Stan muttered, taking a slab of ribs from Mike and putting it next to a choice cut.

"We killed three full grown animals this week. We'll probably do that for most the summer..." Mike said, "The butcher will salt some of it, and sell it later in winter. And they'll freeze some stuff too..." Stan swallowed hard as Mike held up a bag full of sheep intestines, and took them by the top and put them in the basket as quick as he could manage. Mike chuckled at the unsettled boy.

"If you'd grown up eating chitlings, you'd feel different about those..." Stan glanced back at them, then seemed to choke back vomit.

"Those...are from a pig, right? Because I can't eat pork...Jews can't eat them, especially their intestines..."

"Usually chitlings are from a pig. But not these..." Mike said, "Those are from a sheep..."

"Well, Jews shouldn't be able to eat sheep intestines either..." Stan moaned, then looked at Mike, "Is this just a meat farm? Don't you... like, grow stuff? Like fruit or corn or...something?" Mike looked at him, then shook his head.

"Well, we grow grass and hay for the sheep and some corn for the pigs, but we don't grow any crops...not anymore anyway. My mother used to keep a little field way down by the creek. She used to tell me my father grew all sorts of things out there. But...she hasn't kept it in years..." Mike said, recalling from his youth walking with his mother, passing different vegetables and flowers laid out in neat rows and helping her put fertilizer down and water the rows of plants.

"Is it still there?" Stan asked. Mike looked at the boy, who seemed on the verge of being ill, and pointed.

"Let's go find out. Here, put this last cut in there and we'll walk it down to the creek..." Mike wrapped up a large leg of lamb, then Stan

put it in the basket. The two of them pushed the bike out of the cold house, then they went slowly through the farm. Stan, not having visited it for a couple years, asked Mike about everything he could remember, and Mike was happy to show him. The old barn where they kept most the sheep. The newer barn, just over the hill, which was for the pigs and stank to high heaven. The two big hen houses and the shared fenced-in area where the chickens were busily clucking and pecking at the ground around them. Stan paused to pet a few of the chickens, and Mike even put one into Stan's arms for a bit before it clucked loudly and started pecking at the boy's face. Then they went down the hill, past the farm's ancient root cellar, a squat supply shed filled to bursting with different farm tools, and a small hay and corn field. Then, they found the remains of his mother's field, a set of four dirt mounds, each about 6 by 4 feet, planted on a gentle slope on that side of the hill.

The creek, strong and loud in spring and winter, was making little more than a trickling noise, and beyond that, numerous tall, diverse trees shook in the wind, while birds sang and chirped as they bounced from tree to tree. The combinations of the sounds and sight gave the place a sense of calmness and serenity, and Mike felt compelled to set the bike down, and sit on the ground next to the mounds. Stan followed, getting down next to Mike, and he looked up into the woods and trees, his eyes bouncing from branch to branch, and probably from bird to bird. They sat like this for what to Mike seemed like a long time, then finally, Stan leaned over the nearest mound and put a few fingers in the dirt.

"The soil isn't good anymore...but the place is perfect..."

"Yeah. But, if the dirt's bad..." Mike shrugged, "I suppose it's just stay overgrown..." Stan ran a few fingers over the dirt, then looked up at Mike.

"What if...what if I came here...a few times a week? And planted some flowers?" Stan asked. Mike turned, and his eyes meet Stan's. And somehow, this question, this idea, it felt like the most natural thing in the world. In fact, it seemed as if both Stan and Mike were being led to this conclusion by something bigger than either of them.

"Yeah. I think you should do that. I'll help you get it ready. But I'm

not any good with plants..."

"That's alright. I'm not any good with animals. But my mother used to have me help with a community garden, up until last year. I actually kind've miss it...I think it'll be nice raising flowers again..." Mike smiled at the boy. Then, there was a loud yell, and he turned around to see his furious grandfather coming toward him.

"Dammit Mike, what are you doing? You should've been gone by now, boy! I told you to get going with the meat by 11:30, its nearly 12! And why the hell are you out here on the back 40? I already took care of the hay, ain't shit else here!" his grandfather yelled, stomping toward him. Mike stood up slowly and started trying to explain himself, knowing it was probably a useless exercise.

"I was trying to show...some of the farm...and the old garden. And... I...my bike..."

"Mr. Hanlon!" Stan jumped up and stepped in front of Mike, "It's my fault. I borrowed Mike's bike and I asked if he would show me this old field. I..." Stan took a deep breath, then continued, "I was hoping...I could plant some flowers here..." the old man, who was no longer fuming, now had more a look of confusion on his face. He stopped just in front of Stan and squinted at the boy, his eyes searching for something, perhaps recognition. After a moment, he drew back and cleared his throat.

"You're that Jew boy aren't you? That rabbi's kid, the one always sending Jessica home with those cookies..." the old man said, then looked at the field, "Gonna be a hell of a lot of work, hope those pretty hands know how to handle some dirt...come on you two..." Mike's grandfather waved at the boys, and started back up the hill. Mike, surprised by his grandfather's sudden calmness, looked at Stan, then picked up the bike and the two of them pushed it, following the old man to the shed on the side of the hill. When he opened it, Mike's grandfather fished out a garden rake, a hoe, a hand shovel as well as a spade, then he dragged out two bags of soil.

"Alright Jew boy..." the old man picked up a set of gloves and held them out to Stan, "This ought to be enough to get you started. I've got a few seeds in here too, but you're probably gonna wanna have you

momma buy you some flowers from the store...they'll grow better this late in the summer..." Stan took the gloves and held them tightly, like they were something precious. Mike smiled at him, then his grandfather snapped at him.

"Now you listen. If that boy plants his flowers and you just let his field turn back into that mess out there, I'mma kick your ass, Michael!" the old man roared. Stan smiled at Mike, then put on his gloves slowly, and flexed his fingers, as if testing them out, "Looks like they fit," Mike's grandfather continued, "They'll be yours here at the farm. Now, boy!" his grandfather held up a finger at Mike, a scowl taking over his face, "You best get! That meat is gonna rot if you don't get it down to the butcher now! And you know what happens if they tell me they can't sell my product!" Mike nodded, and quickly gathered the tools and soil on the side of the shed, then, he joined Stan in pushing the bike back through the farm to the street. Mike got on the seat, and Stan moved to sit behind him, letting his gloved hands slip around Mike's chest. As they started away, Mike noticed something. That the void, that emptiness, it was almost nothing. A shallow hole, almost filled.

"Stan..." Mike murmured, as Stan leaned forward and put his chin on Mike's shoulder.

"Mike..." he muttered back. And the two exchanged no more words as they headed into town.

Unlike either Mike or Stan, Richie did not feel a void or emptiness. Instead, Richie had been feeling a certain lack of inhibition over the last 2 weeks. In fact, Richie seemed to be in denial about the very idea of consequences. He'd cussed out most everyone he'd seen or talked to: his cousins, his parent's friend's kids, his parent's friends, and even his mother, which had gotten him a slap to the face from his father. He'd jumped off the cliff into the quarry's waters twice already, not even slightly afraid of the rocks nor the height. The day before, he'd been out exploring the woods near his house until almost 2 in the morning despite the many sounds of animals, the dangerous pitfalls and the rotting trunks he'd traversed. He didn't even care about the irritated yelling of his mother that he heard when he'd come back. Richie just couldn't seem to make himself worry about responsibilities or being punished for his actions. In summary, he just

didn't seem to give a fuck.

Some part of him suspected it was because of the Loser's club. He hadn't seen any of the other members since Neibolt street, not even Eddie. Seeing Bill, or Ben, or even Beverly or Mike, he didn't really care about. And he knew no matter what he wanted to do, his mother would drag him to Stan's Bar Mitzvah in two weeks, so he didn't really feel a rush on seeing him either. But he did have to admit he missed Eds, who was now locked tightly in his house by his overprotective mother. Richie missed the boy's weak constitution and dour demeanor. He also missed the stack of medical conditions piled on top of the diabetes that made it so easy to crack jokes about him and the way Eddie furrowed his eyebrows and crinkled his forehead when those jokes made him angry. And though he'd never admit it to anyone, Richie missed Eddie's soft chuckle too, a small, almost unnoticeable laugh that only came out rarely, when Richie made a really good one.

Nonetheless, Richie, feeling footloose and unbridled, had walked out of the door of his house after breakfast, and got onto his bike, recovered two days ago when he'd spontaneously walked over to Neibolt, pissed on the remains of the gate, and reclaimed his ride. He sped away from his home, toward downtown Derry. He tested out tricks and jumps on the bike as rode there, and arrived just outside City Hall, flung his ride against a streetlight and started wandering the sidewalk, whistling loudly. He made his way down Main Street for a while, greeting the people he'd pass in various iterations of British, French, Russian and Mexican accents, receiving irritated glares or disquieted glances from most of them, then he crossed over to go to the city park, nearly getting hit by a honking car on the way.

"Watch where you're going you stupid motherfucker!" Richie yelled, slamming his hand on the car's hood and giving the driver the middle finger. The man inside leaned out and flung out a hand at the boy.

"You're the one walking across the street without looking! Be careful kid! You're gonna end up as roadkill!" Richie stepped out of the way of the car and stuck out his tongue.

"Your mom's ass!" Richie shouted. The man shook his head, then started on, leaving Richie giggling to himself, "Idiot..." The irreverent

boy took a few steps and hesitated, as he was suddenly faced with a circus. The construction of a circus that is. It was Derry's annual Independence Day Circus Party, and Richie was seeing clowns. A lot of them. A group of three were standing to one side, each with a cigarette in their hand. Two others were arguing over balloon animals they were holding. Others seemed to be walking back and forth, talking or moving boxes and materials. And one...one was mysteriously sitting on a bench, holding a big red balloon and facing away from Richie. This clown was bald on the top, though it had a mess of red puffs of hair on the sides. And, it was in a white and grey ruffled clown costume. One very similar to...that clown...

Richie drew back from it, trying not to lose his shit, when a hand gripped his shoulder.

"Richie..." a voice said behind him.

"Motherfucker! Back the fuck up!" Richie roared, jumping back and holding up his fists, though he didn't know what exactly he was going to do. After a moment, he dropped his hands as he recognized that the man behind him was Zack Denbrough, Bill's dad. Mr. Denbrough was partially dressed like a clown, in a big, stripped white and red one piece and a conical hat with a pom-pom on the top. But he was otherwise normal, and Richie didn't really feel evil emanating from him.

"Richie!" Mr. Denbrough said, drawing back at the foul boy. Richie knew he'd cussed out Bill's father, but his lack of concern took him over and he suddenly didn't care.

"What are you doing here? Why are you dressed like a clown?" Richie asked, drawing back from the man. Mr. Denbrough, still frowning, crossed his arms.

"The mayor asked some of the folks around town to be part of the post-July Fourth Circus Party. But you had to have a circus style costume, and I found this clown suit in the mall last week. We just finished with a run-through. Most of these folks don't know anything about clowning, that was just the easiest thing to dress up as..." Richie looked Mr. Denbrough's costume, examining for any signs of evil or blood on his fingers, then, he looked back to the other clowns

and saw he recognized a lot of them. His neighbor, his cousin's neighbors, the old man who lived down the street, and even the one sitting down, the bald one with the red balloon, stood up and turned around, and Richie recognized him as Mr. Marvin, a normally old, slow and boring math teacher at his school. Mr. Marvin had a daughter, however, a cute one, and Richie could see that she was out in the park too, sitting on a bench a short distance away from him, talking with two other girls.

"Richie, do your parents know you're down here? And talking like that?" Mr. Denbrough asked. Richie shrugged, and started walking away from Mr. Denbrough, moving toward the girls.

"Sort've. I told them I was out! Nice to see you Mr. Denbrough. Tell Bill I said hi!" Richie said, turning toward the girls. He regretted it as soon as the words were out. He should've told Mr. Denbrough to tell Bill to fuck off. Richie almost turned around to say that, but he could see Mr. Denbrough shaking his head and walking away, and instead turned to move toward the girls, smiling and starting to whistle again. As he stepped right up to Lillia Marvin, Richie leaned heavily on the side of the bench and gave her a wide grin.

"Hey pretty thing..." Richie said in what was apparently a new voice. He'd call this one, *Charming Paramour*. Of course, it sounded a lot like Richie's normal voice, except it was a little deeper and said things he could barely believe were coming out of his mouth, "What's a babe like you doing around the circus freaks?" Lillia, along with the other two girls, were so shocked by Richie's forwardness that they just stared at him for a while. Richie bounced his eyebrows, then Lillia, finally finding her voice, scoffed and drew back from him.

"Back up, four-eyes! I'm dating Victor, loser..." Richie had, vaguely, remembered hearing that this girl was in fact dating Vic Criss, a tall, and cruel member of Henry Bowers gang. Richie also recalled something else he'd heard about Vic.

"Oh right, Victor. So, I was wondering and you would know, is his dick really just a little bigger than my pinkie here..." Richie held up his small finger, then, he bent it slightly, "I heard it's also shaped like a banana. Must not be so fun to have inside you, huh?" Lillia's eyes were wide, as were the two other girls, who both looked at each

other, then at Lillia and, to Richie's delight, started to snicker. Lillia, however, jumped to her feet and shoved Richie back.

"Get out of here trashmouth! I'll...I'll..." Lillia trailed off, and Richie smiled.

"I think you'll find I'm a much more sizable...and better fuck, sugar..." the two other girls were now struggling to hold back laughter, and Lillia, now red and angry, stomped away.

"We'll see you later, Richie..." one of the other girls said. Richie winked at them, then continued wandering the park, whistling to himself. He looked over the setup for the rest of the circus event, cursed at the smoking clowns, who laughed at the boy, and then looked into a few of the fireworks cannons. He finally started heading to other side of the park, back in the direction of his bike, when he saw two boys zoom past him. It was just a flash, but he recognized that it was Stan and Mike, on the black boy's bike, which Richie suddenly remembered he'd forgotten to give back to him, and they were headed quickly down Main Street. Richie moved to follow them, but saw they were turning down East Avenue, probably in the direction of Stan's house. He thought about heading there to meet them, but his plan was interrupted by a scream. A scream that was approaching him.

"Where are you, fuckface? Say your stupid insults to my face!" Richie turned around to see Victor, with Lillia at his side, stomping through the middle of the park. Richie, who clearly lost any concern for his own safety, whistled as loud as he could and waved at the boy.

"Hey Victor, sounds like you're a little offended. If you want, I'll take mine out and we can measure! Unless you're scared what I said might be true?" Richie yelled. He started to undo his pants, but couldn't get very far, as Victor was soon barreling toward him, a fury in his eyes that Richie suspected it was best to run from. Richie took off down an alley, Victor on his heels, then went around another corner, and was in front of a flower shop. Richie shoved the door open as hard as he could, then turned and ran past the shop, rounding another corner. Finally, he was back on Main Street, and he sighed in relief for a moment before Victor roared again.

"Four-eyed faggot! You can't hide from me!"

Richie, hearing the voice nearing him, rushed down the sidewalk until he got to the first door, and burst through it. The door flung open with a loud ring, and Richie cursed under his breath, then tried quickly to push it shut. Richie looked out of through a nearby window to see Victor come out on Main Street a few seconds later, looking back and forth. Richie stepped back from the window, giggling at the confused boy, and turned around and bumped into Eddie. It took Richie a moment to recognize where he was; the white, sterile environment of the store told him he had to be in Mr. Keene's pharmacy. Each aisle was filled with band-aids, wraps, cotton, as well as bottles and bottles of pills and liquids. And, Eddie was standing there, in the middle of two aisles, his right hand in a tight white cast, his left holding a bag of what appeared to be numerous pills. Eddie, his face filled with surprise, hesitated, then he leaned forward.

"Richie...is that you? Are you..." Eddie couldn't finish as Richie snatched up the boy in a big bear hug and nearly picked him up.

"Eds!" Richie yelled squeezing the boy tightly. Probably too tightly. After a moment, Eddie's unbroken hand wrapped around Richie, and the boy made an effort to pressed his head into Richie's arm.

"Richie...I missed you..."

"I missed..." Richie started, before, he was interrupted by an angry squeal.

"Eddie! What are you doing!" Richie turned to see Eddie's mother thunder down an aisle and snatch the small boy's good hand into hers. Sonia Kapsbrak was a big woman; Richie had often mocked Eddie about the size of the her trunk-like legs and arms, sizable breasts and hefty bottom. The woman looked down at Richie with thick glasses, almost as thick as Richie's, and scoffed at him, "You stay away from my Eddie! You and your friends' antics broke my boy's arm. Oh, I knew it was a mistake to bring you out to the pharmacist, Eddie..." Richie looked at Eddie, who averted his gaze for a few seconds, and Richie sighed, and turned around to see Victor open the pharmacy door. The boy went to one aisle and started to pursue different set of band-aids, but his glances at Richie made it

clear why he was there. Richie gulped and started to stumble back to Eddie and his mother.

"Shit...I'm dead..."

"Vic?" Eddie muttered, then looked at Richie and whispered, "Richie, what did you do?"

"Don't talk to him, Eddie! He's a bad influence, and probably going to make you sicker..." his mother said. This, amazingly, caused Eddie to start yelling, something Richie couldn't ever remember seeing him do.

"Mom. I know I'm sick!" Eddie spat, pulling his arm away from her, "I know I have diabetes. You never let me forget it. But Mom, Richie didn't cause that. Richie didn't make me get sick as a baby, Richie didn't give didn't give me asthma or gut problems or heart disease, okay? Richie didn't break my arm either! He told Bill not to take us there, and when I went anyway, I fell and broke my arm bad, and it was Richie who fixed it!"

"But...but Eddie..."

"Mom. I'm miserable. I'm miserable trapped with you. But, I felt happy today..." Eddie went over and wrapped an arm in Richie's, "I'm happy because I saw Richie. You want me to be safe AND happy, right, Mom?" the big woman shifted her weight from leg to leg in what looked to be a very uncomfortable manner. Then, she groaned and looked over Richie.

"Just him, right?" she asked. Eddie held Richie's arm tightly. Richie gave her a big, silly grin, then glanced over his shoulder to see Victor was close, pretending to look over bandage wraps now.

"Ugh, Mom...Okay, just Richie..." Eddie said.

"I'll be very good, Ms. Kapsbrack. Only games where Eddie can't get hurt. And I'll be gone before it gets dark and Eddie could trip..." Eddie elbowed the boy, but Richie only grinned wider. The woman sighed, then waved a hand.

"Very well. Richie, just Richie, can spend time with you..." Eddie

glanced at Victor, then at his mother.

"What if he came over now? Like, got in the car with us to go home?"

"Eddie, I..."

"Please..." Eddie asked, looking pitiful and sad. The woman sighed again and nodded.

"Okay. For my little Eddie, he can. Let me just pick up my cough medicine..." she said, starting away. Eddie looked at her, then at Richie and at Victor as she started to move toward another aisle. The two boys tried to stay behind her, and Victor behind them, none trying to get too close nor out of sight of the other. Eventually, Richie turned Eddie suddenly down one aisle, then jerked him as hard as he could to another aisle. Then, Richie went to the pharmacy desk and snuck under it, hiding behind the counter as Victor came past. He growled and moved on to the far side, glancing around. Richie giggled as he left and he saw Eddie did too. That was the laugh he'd missed. Richie gave him a grin, then looked down to see Eddie's cast was signed. Someone had written LOSER on it.

"Eddie? Who did that?" Richie asked. Eddie looked at him, then pointed to a girl, chewing gum and flipping through a magazine, who was sitting behind the counter as well. This was Gretta, the pharmacist's daughter, and she didn't even seem to notice the two, still flipping through the magazine until Richie stood up.

"Hey, toots..." Richie said, winking at her. She looked up, then dropped the magazine and stood up as well.

"You're not supposed to be back here, Four-eyes!" Gretta said.

"I know I'm not..." Richie said, leaning over and grabbing a big red marker from a desk near her, "But I had to fix Eds' here cast..." Richie grabbed the boy's arm, and started to mark over the cast, replacing the S in LOSER with a V to make LOVER. Gretta watched him, then blew and snapped a gum bubble in his face.

"Real cool. Now, get out from..."

"Wait, I got one more thing to write!" Richie said, rushing forward,

marker in hand, and grabbing the girls shoulder. He made a big V on her forehead, then jumped back.

"There! V for virgin!"

"What! You little!" the girl started for Richie, but he pulled Eddie out from the desk and got on the outside, where Ms. Kapsbrack was coming forward with a set of bottles.

"Gretta dear, ring me up!" the woman said. The girl hesitated, then the pharmacist, Mr. Keene, came out from the back and put his hands on his hips.

"Come on Gretta, I've shown you how to do this..." Gretta, now covering her forehead, looked between her father, Ms. Kapsbrack and Richie, and pushed past him, almost crying.

"What got into her?" Mr. Keene asked. Ms. Kaspbrak shrugged.

"Probably allergies. I'd add some Claritin to her dosage if I were you..."

"Right..." Mr. Keene murmured, then scanned the medicine quickly and took Ms. Kaspbrak's money. The big woman was soon leading the boys out, past a truly furious Victor, who Richie flicked off as he walked past, then the two boys got into the back seat of the car with the woman. Soon, they were leaving central Derry behind, and Richie was sighing in relief, while Eddie was looking in wonder at his cast.

"You...you fixed it..."

"Yeah, Eds, I couldn't have you walking around with that messed up thing on it..."

"Lover..." Eddie murmured, then look up at him, admiration and... something else in his eyes. Richie smiled, then looked at the thick pile of medication next to Eddie.

"Jesus man. You've got it bad. I've never even heard of some of these medicines..." Richie said, picking up one bottle with a red top, "This has...pla-ce-bo in it? Must be strong stuff..." Eddie frowned then grabbed a blue bottle and looked at that.

"This has placebo in it too. I wonder why they both..." his mother reached a powerful hand back and swiped up most of the medication.

"Look Eddie, you made me pick up the boy and got mad at me for bringing up your sicknesses. Don't waste time talking about them, then, right?" Ms. Kaspbrak said.

"You hear that Eddie? You better listen now, whippersnapper!" Richie asked, in his "Old Man Eustace" voice, then he looked up at Eddie's mother and returned to his normal tone, "Wait, do you mind if we stop by my house, Ms. Kaspbrak? I got a new game for us to play. It's called *Trouble*..." the woman gave Richie a skeptical glance and he held up a hand, "It's a board game, real fun. Newest biggest thing... doesn't involve real trouble, I promise..." the woman eyed Eddie in the mirror, then nodded, and Richie turned Eddie, smiling, "It's gonna be a load of fun, I..." Eddie suddenly leaned over and grabbed Richie with his good hand, pulling him in close.

"I missed you Richie...I'm glad you're here..." Eddie whispered in his ear, and put his head onto Richie's shoulder. Richie beamed back and leaned in to Eddie's ear.

"Awh...I missed you to, Eddie..." Richie said, then, he noticed something. Something surprising, that shocked even him. Richie, once again, gave a fuck.

"Richie went out this morning, like he has the last couple of days. But I'll let him know you want to hang out, Ben..."

"Thank Mrs. Tozier..." Ben said, then put the phone down. He looked back at Beverley, who was sitting one of his living room chairs, raised an eyebrow.

"Progress?"

"Maybe. At least Richie will get my message...Eddie's mother didn't even answer..."

"You're doing better than I am. Mike's grandfather told me, as a white girl, to stay away from his black grandson..."

"Good lord..." Ben sighed, then crossed his arms and looked at Bill

who was sitting on the other side of his living room. He had a glass of Ben's mother's lemonade on the table next to him, but unlike Beverly, who had drank most of hers, Bill's was largely untouched. The boy was clearly deep in thought. Or maybe he was stuck in a funk. Ben had noted that, more than usual, Bill had seemed to be feeling a certain listlessness over the past three weeks. Ben wasn't himself totally together either. He was feeling a deep sense of guilt about the events in the house. If he'd drawn a short straw instead of Mike, he might've better protected Richie or Eddie. If he'd practiced or worked out harder before, he might have been able to keep the werewolf clown from striking Beverly. If he had done javelin instead of discus, he might've been able to skewer the bat clown before it made Stan pee himself. This was making him work out hard or plan out scenarios in preparation for fighting the clown again. And that guilt and his attempts to fix it were making it hard to enjoy the summer.

Every time he tried to do something he really enjoyed, playing basketball, or reading the horror or fantasy novels he normally loved, or even listening to his large collection of New Kids on the Block tapes, he'd lose focus, start reflecting on his failures at the Neibolt house, and be back to prepping for another showdown with the clown. His crushing regret faded, however, when he was with Beverly. And that had translated to him spending a lot of time with her; watching movies together, playing games; he would even read while she practiced piano or threw discus while she talked to him. As long as he was with her...it was better. This didn't seem to be the case for Bill, who looked barely able to do more than move whenever Ben saw him.

"Bill..." Ben said. Bill turned to look at him, and Ben sighed, "You had any luck? With Richie or Stan?"

"Not for hanging out," Bill said, running a hand through his hair and shaking his head, "I did get Stan's mom to tell me the day and time of his Bar Mitzvah. And, I really think if I go, I'm going to see both Richie and Mike there..."

"Hmph...you with Richie?" Beverly muttered, clasping her hands together, "Should I come with you? So there isn't a scene?" Ben looked at the girl. The girl of his dreams. She was radiant in the morning sun at that moment, and, unlike either Ben or Bill, seemed

to be her same strong young woman they'd both talked to on the last day of school, neither unmoored or weakened by encounters with the clown.

"No...I don't think it will help..." Bill said, looking back out of the window. Ben started to feel a certain regret that he couldn't help Bill keep the Losers together, "If I go alone...maybe...maybe me and Richie can be honest with each other...without it becoming a shouting match. My dad said he saw Richie last week. He said Richie cursed him out, but told him to tell me 'hi.' Part of me suspects my dad was trying to make me feel better...but...maybe, if his anger is starting to thaw..."

"Oh Bill...I'm sorry man. Good luck..." Ben said. Beverley sighed, and shook her head.

"You guys...I thought you were best friends? The four of you, Stan, Eddie, Richie and you. Mike, Ben and I were on the outside...you guys knew each other forever..."

"Since school started..." Bill said, resting his head on a hand and frowning, "I probably knew Richie before that. We don't live that far apart..."

"When I saw you guys in school, you seemed okay..."

"Richie didn't usually yell or fight with me in front of Stan and Eddie. Because Stan and Eddie don't know what happened, other than it was something bad. Nobody knows everything. But..." Bill turned back to the window and sighed, "I made a horrible mistake. A stupid, childish mistake, and I hurt Richie's feelings. And he hates me for it. Maybe he should..." Ben's regret suddenly overwhelmed him. His regrets for almost wrong everything he did. Ben sighed deeply and felt like his every mistake was being replayed in his mind. But, after a moment, he sensed that maybe it wasn't really his regret. Ben looked up, and made a decision. Bill had to come to terms with what happened between him and Richie, or the Loser club would be killed or destroyed by the clown.

"We don't have time for this..." Beverley said, agreeing with Ben's thoughts, "The clown isn't waiting around for us to resolve our

differences. We've got to get the group back together..."

"Right..." Ben said. He sat down on a loveseat opposite Bill and next to Beverley, "Can't you two just hash out your differences and work it out?"

"I've tried..." Bill said, "But, Richie won't forgive me. He said so again, outside the Neibolt house..."

"Can I help? Maybe talk to Richie for you, or mediate..." Ben asked. Bill shrugged.

"Eddie's tried. A lot. Stan tried once. You can try. But I don't think... anything can fix what I broke..." Bill sighed, and looked again out of the window. Beverley snorted, and grabbed her purse. Ben only then noticed she was carrying it with her. It seemed like something she didn't want to carry, but her mother made her take with her. Ben suddenly felt bad for her having to carry it, and held out a hand.

"If you need Beverley, I..."

"Hush Big Ben. I don't need you sad sapping about this...Come on, Bill. You look half a ghost. Let's go do something..." Beverley said. Ben looked at her, then glanced down at the paper in front of him and saw movie times. And had an idea. In a dark theater, where Ben could talk to Bill quietly...

"Let's go see *Batman*. It's still playing...there's a show in a half hour," Ben said. Beverley sighed and looked at Bill, who remained fixed on something outside of the window.

"Ugh...superheroes..." Beverley muttered, then went to Bill and put her hand on his, "Come on Bill. Let's go see if it's worth it..." Bill turned to her slowly, then stood up. Ben and Beverley almost guided the boy to his bike, and, once on the famed, *Silver*, Bill momentarily became lively. They raced to the theater, the bulked up Ben crushing his competition, and, as it turned out, they were three of only about 10 moviegoers for that show. Once they got their tickets, Beverley led the group to the concession stand, where a young, heavy, college age boy with acne and glasses was behind the register. Beverley flirted him into giving her a bag a popcorn while Ben paid for his favorite

candy, *Butterfinger* bites. Bill remained indecisive and was staring at the different candy boxes vacantly until Beverley demanded he get something sweet, and so he ended up with *Care Bear Gummi Bears*. The three of them sat in the largely empty theater, eating their snacks as advertisements played on the big screen. Ben sat next to Bill, with Beverley on the other side, and Ben leaned over to Bill after throwing back a handful of candy.

"Hey..." Ben started, "Bill, what happened between you and Richie?" Bill glanced at him, then looked at Beverley, who was at that moment focused on the ad for *Steel Magnolia's* coming out later that year. Bill glanced back at Ben, and sighed.

"I can't tell you. Richie would hate me more. And I...I'm afraid...of it..."

"The clown?" Bill hesitated, then shook his head.

"No. I'm afraid of what happened. And...and of what I'm apparently capable of..." Bill whispered, perhaps a little too loudly. Ben sighed, and threw back another handful of the *Butterfinger*, then looked back at Bill.

"I think...maybe...one reason Eddie and Stan couldn't help you two is because they didn't know what happened. If...if it's a secret, the guilt...it will haunt you until you die...but...if somebody knows..."

"I'm telling you, Richie would hate me, completely. And never forgive me."

"Shh!" Ben and Bill turned to where an older woman was sitting a few rows up. Ben rolled his eyes at the woman, then leaned in close to Bill's ear.

"Isn't that how he feels about you now?" Ben asked. Bill glanced at Ben, then looked back at the screen. Ben suspected that somewhere, in some universe, Bill would've started stuttering and mumbling about what happened. But here, in this world, as the opening sounds of *Batman* began, Bill looked at Ben and spoke fluently about the events. As fluently as could be expected.

"It was a camp, summer of last year. Two weeks. There was an earthquake right before...and I caught something there...a real bad cough...then Georgie..." Bill trailed off, then cleared his throat, "Richie and me and some boys from other schools around Maine went. No one else from Derry. Stan was doing some Jewish thing and Eddie's mother wouldn't let him leave home that long..."

"Richie and I were in a cabin for days. And days. And we..." Bill paused, looked at Beverley, engrossed in the movie, and then looked at Ben, "Well, me and Richie hung out a lot...because...we didn't know anyone else. And then...one day...a horrible day...I was in the showers..." Ben looked at Bill, an eyebrow raised.

"What...did you..."

"It wasn't that...Richie...you know how he is. He had a washcloth soaked in vinegar or snake oil or something he was going to hit me with. But, of course, he looked like he was sneaking into my shower stall. And when I shoved him out, I yelled that he was a faggot and should get lost..." Bill shook his head as he said this a little too loud.

"Shh!" the old woman made the same noise and Bill, sighing, leaned in to Ben's ear.

"The other boys saw...and misunderstood. Or wanted to, they never like "Four-eyes" anyway. So, they called him names, beat him up, spat on him, Richie was so mortified, so tortured..." Bill sighed, "He didn't mean it. It was a joke. But..." Ben looked at him, feeling horrible, empathetic regret for Richie at what had to seem like a tragic horror story, even with boys he probably would never see again. If fact, it was almost laughably convenient, a horribly embarrassing experience that would last only a few days and have little to no lasting impact on life in Derry.

"But Bill...if all you did was call him it once, then other boys..."

"It wasn't just them! I...I was finally cool at the camp, not a nobody, and so...I made fun of him too! More than any of them!" Bill spat. He covered his mouth, and looked at the angry old woman, who glared at the boys. Ben could see tears welling in his eyes, and Beverley put a hand on Bill's shoulder.

"Explain to Ben quieter!" Beverley said. Bill looked her over and nodded, then turned back to Ben.

"Why, Bill? Did it matter that much?" Ben asked as quiet as he could. Bill shrugged, then leaned in to his ear again.

"I don't know. I really don't. I don't even know why we had to go to that stupid summer camp. But I did, and I joined with the other boys and mocked him. I told him he was a faggot and needed to keep away from me. And the other boys made Richie take his sleeping bag outside so that I could have my room to myself the last few days. And I let them."

"The minute the camp was over, I figured out what an idiot I was. When we were home, I tried to apologize, tried to explain I had been stupid and mean and horrible. But it was too late. Richie hated me. And now, he still hates me...then, I was got sick as hell, and my brother was killed...what a shitty fucking summer..."

"Bill..." Ben murmured, now feeling the horrible regret and disgust Bill was emanating, "Wow...you messed up...like bad. Like really bad..."

"I know I did, Ben, I know, dammit..." Bill muttered, looking back at the screen. Batman was swinging down from a building, kicking a villain as he went, quickly solving his problems. Ben suspected Bill wished it was that easy for him, "I don't know how to fix what happened. It's...it's like something bigger than either of us created that situation so that it couldn't be fixed...maybe if I had a stutter or was messed up some other way, he'd...I don't know, be more okay with me."

"Look, maybe if was fat, I would've been the one Henry Bowers was trying to carve on instead of you. And maybe then...maybe we wouldn't have ever met each other. Or maybe we would be better friends than before. But, we can't change who we are, we just have to..."

"Excuse me boys..." a man in the uniform of the theater said. He was standing at the end of the row, leaning over toward Bill, Ben and Beverley, though he was looking at the two boys in particular, "I've

heard several complaints about you. And I'm going to have to ask you to leave as you are disturbing the other patrons..." Ben looked at him, then at Bill, who sighed and stood up, going past Beverley and the man and walking out. Ben moved to follow him, going around the man roughly and following Bill as he wandered out of the theater. Once they were outside, Ben reached out and grabbed Bill's arm.

"Hey, we don't have to take that! He can't tell us to leave! You know how much talking I heard when I saw *Do the Right Thing*?"

"It's okay Ben...you were right. Telling you...helped me. Now that somebody knows. It almost feels like a weight I was carrying...I've put it down...I hope you don't hate me too, though..." Bill said.

"No...I don't hate you. But...Bill...I think..." Ben hesitated. He barely knew this boy, hell, any of these people. But he knew in his heart that what he was saying was true, "If you and Richie can't make peace and work together, the Loser's club...it's going to be hard for us to keep together. Or to win against the clown..." Bill looked at Ben, and shrugged.

"Then we need to make sure the group gets back together..."

"Hmph..." Beverley stomped out of the theater, arms crossed and face in a scowl, "Well, you got kicked out of a movie. I hope it was worth it..." Bill looked her over, then Ben had an idea. He was going to try to fix Bill's guilt. Because he'd been in a bad spat before.

"You know...I got an idea..." Ben said, "One time, back in my old house, I once got into with my dad. Really got into it. He and I weren't talking for a whole month. But then, my mom bought me a new model dragon. A really big one, that I had to use glue for. And you know I like fantasy...but my dad does to. So...if I was gonna build it, I had to have his help. And he really needed me because my hands were smaller and could connect the pieces easier...we had to stop fighting, stop arguing, stop giving the cold shoulder, and work together. And soon, me and my dad were close again..."

"What are you gonna do Ben, lock Bill and Richie in a room with a model plane and hope they come out holding hands?" Beverley asked. Bill looked at her, then at Ben, and for the first time in weeks, maybe

in months, Ben saw a smile slip on Bill's face.

"No, not a model. But I've got something for us to do. Something Richie, Eddie and I did together when we were younger...something I suspect they won't be able to resist..." Bill started walking away from the theater, heading in the direction of the quarry, and beyond, the barrens, "We're going to build a dam."

4. Chapter 3: Birds and Rodents

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;"Stan stepped in front of the mirror, and looked himself over. He was in a tight button up, a nice shirt, with long sleeves. And he was of course in one of his nicest pair of khaki shorts with a shiny leather belt holding them up. He adjusted the buttons in the mirror, then sighed and groaned. Trying to look nice this day was stupid, since he'd be down on his knees digging through muck in a couple of minutes. In three days, at his Bar Mitzvah, yeah, it made sense to get his hair straightened and to make sure his suit fit and that his new tallit was cleaned and spotless. But today, since it was finally time for him to plant his flowers on Mike's farm, it made no sense what so even to try and look nice. But, here he was...trying to look nice. Somewhere in his heart, he thought he knew why, though he wouldn't let himself consider it. Instead, for now, he remained busy fussing about how his buttons looked in front of the mirror until his mother started calling him./p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;"Stanley! Stanley, are you ready?" Andrea Uris, an at home mother and doting parent, called from downstairs. Stan sighed, tried to get his curls in some kind of order, then turned from the mirror./p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;"Almost, mom. Just a minute..." Stan called. And then, the events came back to him. The terror of the bat, the horror of that painting coming to life and attacking him. The huge, bloody teeth of the werewolf. And the awful, evil smile of that clown. Stan tried to breath deeply and not have a breakdown. He was going to see his... well, best friend right now. To plant beautiful flowers in a lovely garden. He'd been back to Mike's farm pretty much every other day

since he'd suggested the idea. And they'd worked on the mounds, weeding them multiple times, replacing all the dirt, and getting mulch ready to cover the florae once they were grown. And now, finally, Stan would get to plant his flowers...the ones his mother had bought earlier today. But, of course...crybaby Stan was going to have a breakdown about the stupid clown. Stan took a few deep breathes, then after a moment, his eyes rose to the top of his mirror, where a small span style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-weight: inherit; font-style: oblique; font-family: inherit; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 0px; padding: 0px;"Magen David/span, or Star of David, was carved out of the wooden frame./p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;"Okay...Adonai..." Stan started, clasping his hands together, which he knew wasn't Jewish, but he wasn't going to stop, "I promise...I'll be a really good Jew. And I'll pray from the Torah perfectly at the Bar Mitzvah and make my father proud...and I'll go to temple, and observe span style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-weight: inherit; font-style: oblique; font-family: inherit; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 0px; padding: 0px;"shabbath/span..." Stan hesitated, then sighed, "I'll do all that. But...I need your help. Because...the clown scares me...so bad. Don't let it hurt me Adonai...please...help me be strong...I'll do whatever you want..."/p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;"Stanley! Stanley, come on, we're gonna be late!" Stan's mother called. Stan sighed, and opened his eyes, looking at the span style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-weight: inherit; font-style: oblique; font-family: inherit; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 0px; padding: 0px;"Magen David /spangrumpily./p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;"Adonai...you made me this way. You made me...weak and a sissy..." Stan hesitated, and shook his head, "I think thoughts that

aren't right. About my best friends...don't punish me for it with the clown...please...give me a way to fight it. Or get away from it. Or...protect me...and my friends, from it." Stan begged, then blew out his breath. It was stupid. It was a stupid prayer and a stupid bargain. God probably didn't care how good Stanley was. Or how often he was in temple. Otherwise, would he have been attacked by his father's painting and a giant bat? Or worse, would he have...those thoughts...about Mike?/p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;""Stanley! Let's go! You're keeping the Hanlons waiting!" his mother called. Stanley undid his top button, then went downstairs quickly. His mother, eyeing him , was standing near the door. As he approached, she held out a plate covered in aluminum foil./p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;""Sorry...mom..." Stan said, taking the Hamantaschen cookies he knew were inside. She sighed, and opened the door./p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;""I already loaded your flowers. But Stanley, you've got to be responsible if you're going to do this. Neither I nor your father are going to make you water or tend to these..."/p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;""I know. I'll take care of them. Thank you..." Stan said. He started out when his mother pointed at their dinner table./p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;""Do you want your birdwatching book and binoculars?" His mother asked.

Stan looked at them, hesitated, then picked them up and carried them with the cookies to the car. Stan wasn't really proud that this was a hobby he'd picked up. He kept it to himself, generally. Richie probably would've teased him mercilessly for it and Bill and Eddie would've laughed at the jokes...so he never told any of them. But, in the creek and woods on the edge of Mike's farm, where he was planting his flowers, it was about as good of bird watching space as you could find in Derry./p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;"Stan got into the car, holding the book, binoculars and cookies, and hoping that Mike wouldn't think he was too uncool. However, his mother was intent on making him do something that was just plain unpleasant before./p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;"Now, Stanley, we made a bargain. I buy you these flowers and take them over to the Hanlon's farm, you memorize your Torah blessings and reading for Saturday..."/p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;"Ugh... right mom..." Stan agreed, trying not to show too much contempt for the language, summoned up and sang the required Hebrew blessings, "Bar'chu et Adonai ham'voras..."/p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;"Ham'vorach, Stanley..." she said. When she corrected him, it was much gentler than his father, who usually spat Hebrew and Yiddish insults at him./p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;"

1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;"
"Ham'vorach...l'olam va-ed..." Stan continued the blessing, needing to have his pronunciation corrected twice more, but finishing the phrase. Stan sighed, and cleared his throat. He'd done the easy part. This was where it got rough./p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;"Ahem...Bembidar, First Reading: Vayedaber...Adonay el-Moshe lemor..." Stan chanted, then started to struggle, "Pinchas... Pinchas ben...bin-Elzar...ben-Aharon hakanhine..."/p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;"Hakohen, Stanley. And its Pinchas ben El'azar," his mother said. Stan, fed up, looked at her and stuck out his lip./p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;"Mom...why can't dad just read the torah? When Ethan Lavie did his Bar Mitzvah, all he had to do was say the prayers and lead the psalm."/p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;"Stanley. We've talked about this...you are the son of the rabbi. There are higher expectations...besides, we made a bargain."/p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;"But... Mom...it's so hard..."/p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;"You're

doing fine, Stanley. Continue from Hakohen..." Stan, sighing, tried his best. He got through most of his seven readings, needing a lot of correcting of pronunciation, but only forgetting one line about how many sheep to use in burnt offerings. He finished just as his mother pulled into Mike's farm's driveway. Stanley undid his seat-belt and was about to throw the door open and jump out when his mother gripped his arm./p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;""Not bad. But you need to practice. Today and tomorrow, okay? Maybe you should practice chanting Hebrew while you're gardening..."/p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;""Mom..." Stan groaned, then he opened the door and jumped out onto the driveway. And his irritation with Hebrew, his frustration with God's unwillingness to negotiate with him, even his deep fear of the clown faded as Stan saw Mike. The boy was already sweaty, and in overalls and a long sleeve shirt. But, his face lit up as Stan approached him, and Stan felt a smile growing on his face as well./p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;""Mike..." /p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;""Stan..." Mike said. Stan paused, then turned to the woman standing next to Mike, the tall, elegant Jessica Hanlon, who was in a tight purple dress that Stan thought looked really nice on her. She had her hair in a ponytail and some makeup on, but she also looked very tired. Her shoulders slouched slightly, and her eyes had big bags under them, probably from working a night shift. Nonetheless, she seemed kind and welcoming as ever. The same could not be said for

Mike's grandfather, the husky, grey haired Leroy Hanlon, who was in grimy overalls and a plaid shirt and denim hat. He had his hands on his hips, and both he and Jessica watched as Stan approached with his plate./p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;""These are for you, Mrs. Hanlon. From my mom..." Stan said, signaling back to his mother, who was getting out of the car./p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;""Why, Stanley, thank you. Your family is so generous to us...we really do appreciate it...."/p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;""Oh, Jessica, you don't need to start all that..." Stan's mother said. Stan nodded at Mrs. Hanlon, then, Mr. Hanlon stepped forward, peeled back the foil, and wrinkled his nose at the Hamantaschen inside./p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;""These them Jew cookies. Hmph...can barely taste the jam for all that bread..." Mr. Hanlon said, then picked up two of the treats and shoved most of both into his mouth. Mrs. Hanlon looked at him in horror./p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;""Leroy! Show some respect. And stop acting like such an animal. The damn pigs eat cleaner than you do!" Mike's grandfather waved a dismissive hand at her, then picked up three more Hamantaschen and started to walk away. Stan smiled at him, then, Stanley's mother went over to Jessica Hanlon and put an arm on her shoulder./p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;""Oh, don't you worry. I had to tell Donald's father yesterday that he can't call the German couple that runs the grocery store Krauts anymore. Why..." Stanley's mother kept talking, but Mike had come over to Stan and held out the boy's farm gloves./p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;""Here Stan..."/p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;""Thanks..." Stan took and put on his gloves, his precious gloves, that gave him power over the garden and maybe his life, and led Mike to his mom's car's trunk, which was filled with flowers: most in sets of six, though a few more shrub like plants were in bigger baskets. The collection included hollyhocks, milkweeds, daisies, golden glow and black-eyed Susans, all plants that Stan's mother knew he loved. Stan smiled at different flowers, then looked at Mike, who nodded./p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;""These are nice. Gonna be rough to plant them all..."/p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;""I think we can manage..." Stan said. Mike nodded, then started picking up flowers. The two of them got most of the plants down to the garden area in three trips, and soon were digging up places for flowers to go. Just before they'd finished burying the first one though, Stan's mother approached, holding his birdwatching book and binocs./p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family:

'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;""Stanley, you forgot these...here. I'm going to take Mrs. Hanlon out for brunch and some shopping. We'll be back a little after 2..."

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;""Okay, thanks. See you..." Stan said, taking the book and binoculars. Stanley's mother leaned down and kissed him on the head.

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;""Be good. I know you two will make this garden look so nice..."

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;""Okay, mom..." Stan said, "Have fun..." She waved at him and Mike, then went back up the hill. Mike watched her go, then smiled at Stan.

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;""Somebody likes his mom..."

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;""It's just...I..." Stan hesitated, then shrugged, "Yeah. I like her. She's nice. And buys me things. Like flowers," Stan patted down the dirt around the first hollyhock, then, using his hand shovel, opened a deep hole nearby for another.

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;""

#2a2a2a;"Hmph...momma's boys aren't so bad...I don't mind this one at least," Mike said, helping Stan get the hole deep enough then placing the hollyhock into the ground, "What's with the book and binoculars?"/p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;"Oh...uh..." Stan looked at the birdwatching book, hesitated a moment, then decided he was going to tell Mike about it, "I...uh...I watch birds. It's one of my favorite hobbies..."/p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;"Watch birds?" Mike questioned, then, there was a yelp, and Mike's grandfather came down the hill quickly./p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;"Mike! Come here! Something's gone sour with the chickens! Couple of the bitches busted through the fences! Get up here!" Mike looked at Stan, then stood up, following his grandfather./p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;"Do you need help?" Stan asked, turning to Mike, who waved him back./p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;"Nawh, my grandpa's probably just in a mood. I'll be right back..." Mike said. Stan watched him go, then, he turned back to the garden. He could've tried to plant more, but he decided to wait, and sat on the grass, looking up into the woods, where numerous birds were bouncing and chirping, cawing, and peeping. He grabbed his book, and started to flip through the pages, identifying chickadees, doves, fly-catchers, shrikes, several cuckoos and a few nighthawks. He even spotted a

swallow tailed kite, which took off and soared far above him. Stan made a small mark in his book for each one he saw and heard, and put a star on the ones he liked the most. He watched the kite closely as it circled around the creek and landed back into the trees. And Stan froze. Because, behind the kite was something...enormous. It was bigger than a golden eagle, which was Stan's first assumption. And, when a huge set of teeth clamped down on the kite, sending feathers and blood shooting out, Stan knew what was happening./p

"No...no...no...no..." Stan said, covering his eyes. When he looked again, however, the creature was now climbing out of the trees, and flapped its great black wings. It was the bat, different slightly, with bigger teeth, larger eyes, and with ears that tipped into sharper peaks. Stan could see the bat was the one they'd fought though...the big wings had holes in them from where it had been stabbed, and as the creature started to take off, it let out a defining screech that caused Stan to cover his ears./p

"I'm coming for you Stanley. You can't hide. Not behind Mike...not behind your stupid Jewish god!" the bat cried, then, "Bar'chu et Adonai ham'vorach l'olam va-ed...Stanely..." this was said in clear, correct Hebrew. And, Stan knew that any chance of praying to God for help was gone; the damn monster spoke the holy language better than he could. Stan started to crawl backward, away from the ominous, approaching bat, and his gloved hand stumbled over his dropped birdwatching book. His fingers fumbled and wrapped around it, and he held it up protectively for a moment, then something inside him drove him to open the book and, insanely, start reading the names of the birds. He started, randomly, with the raptors, the hawks, kites and eagles./p

#2a2a2a;"Swallow-tailed kite! Bald eagle! Great black hawk! Northern harrier!" Stan yelled. The bat seemed unfazed by this, and flapped its wings, which whipped up a great deal of dust and seemed to darken the sky as well. Stan would later recall, however, that the bat didn't really seem to be flying per say...but more or less...floating./p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;"Come on, Stanley, Stanny-boy...come on...I'll take you on a wild ride...we'll fly up....then down to the sewers...and you and I will have such fun..."/p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;"Sharp-shinned hawk! Cooper's hawk, Northern goshawk! Golden Eagle!" and with this cry, Stan suddenly felt he was in control. He didn't know why, or what exactly was happening, but Stan knew he was safe. When the bat swooped in, the claws of its feet were suddenly deflected, and the creature went sailing backwards, crashing with a big splash into the creek. Stan continued to read, moving on to owls, and yelling them at the thing writhing in the water. It splashed and shook and after a moment, blood seemed to come from it, turning the creek red and making Stan draw back and hesitate. But, soon after, the clown raised its head from the water, its orange hair wet and stuck to its face. Its eyes were red, and filled with hatred, and its wide red lips were less of a maniacal smile than a glare./p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;"Son of a bitch! Why are you watching birds and planting flowers in this time string? I made you a fucking faggot, not a goddamned witch!" It yelled. Stan hesitated. That statement was really strange, and Stan was about to ask it to clarify, when it jumped up and raised clawed fingers at him./p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana,

Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;""Die Stanny-boy! Die!" Stan flinched, but pulled himself together enough to start again with the owls./p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;""Great horned owl, Barred owl, Eastern Screech owl!" Stan roared. The clown flew into the air, then dived toward the boy but, just as with the bat, it slammed into some sort of barrier and bounced back with a great pained cry. The clown was now being torpedoed away from Stan, careening back into the creek and sending a pillar of water up into the trees. Stan followed the column of water to see that the birds on trees were no longer singing or bouncing from branch to branch as they had been. Instead, most were sitting still at a single point, and many more were making threatening squawks and hisses at the clown that was writhing in the water. span style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-weight: inherit; font-style: oblique; font-family: inherit; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 0px; padding: 0px;"The birds...are my friends...the birds...are helping me, / spanStan thought./p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;"After a few more seconds of wiggling and growling, the clown surfaced and shook its head, sending water everywhere and then it stood up and pointed angrily as Stan./p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;""You are channeling the eagle? This boy, this weak boy, is using Garuda's wings? How? The eagle is supposed to be dead, broken like its lion brother when the Crimson King snapped that beam in half..." it hesitated, looking Stan over, then it clicked its tongue, "That fucking rat...the rat lied to me! I'll make it pay. You can channel all your brothers through them, I'll still kill these children!" the clown screamed this, then turning, splashed a few times in the water, then

went under. The creek sloshed from the movement and waves from where it had been bounced off the banks, but slowly, the sounds of the normal flow of water and chirps and songs of the birds returned. Stan watched the slow moving water again for a few seconds, his book open and ready, but there was no response or reappearance of the clown. Stan breathed a few times, then looked at his shorts and thanked God several times for keeping him from pissing himself. Then, he recognized something. God had kept his promise. Or his end of the bargain. Stan had a way to protect himself, and maybe even his friends from...It./p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;""Stan!" Mike called, coming back down the hill, "Stan, I heard you yelling, but the chickens were really freaking out up until a few seconds ago. Are you alright?" Stan looked at him and held up the book to the boy./p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;""Mike...I think...I can stop it from hurting me...and hopefully you..." Stan said, beginning to laugh. Because he could protect himself. And that meant he wasn't afraid of It anymore./p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;" align="center"*****/p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;"Eddie was mad. Mad as in angry, not crazy. Because though he was going stir crazy, he was as irritable, frustrated and grumpy as he'd ever been. He couldn't exactly pinpoint when this sour mood started. But it was around when he'd had the cast put on his arm. Eddie was normally a pretty sullen boy. He didn't really like the mockery or silliness of Richie...usually, nor did he enjoy the overly chumminess

of Bill or Stan at times. But...something about the way his mother was doting on him, and keeping him in the house, had caused a spark rage that kept exploding./p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;"Though he had angrily flung a few bottles of pills as well as yelled threateningly at more than one passing neighbor, his mother received most of the ire, in part because of her attempts to separate the boy from his friends. She had tried to lock up her sad little diabetic boy because he was hurt, badly, and had to be protected from more threats. And Eddie had responded by shouting at her, something he never would've imagined doing in his life before. But now he'd done it multiple times. Eddie had instructed her gruffly that he was not his father, and could survive his disease. He had also told her that he was going to die quicker without sunlight and exercise, and that her incessant worrying about him would probably kill the boy right there in that house. And, most importantly, he'd yelled, multiple times, that she was the reason his arm was broken and that he'd rather be out on the street with his friends than stuck in the house with her./p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;"This last complaint was coming because of something Richie had discovered. Richie, the only person Eddie could see during his prison time with his mother, had snatched an encyclopedia from the library and they'd discovered what placebos were: bullshit, just as Gretta had told him. That mean his mother had made him take more medicine than he needed. Way more. In fact, the only real thing he needed was insulin. Everything else was bullshit. And that, in Eddie's mind, was how he'd become a weak, scared boy who had passed out when faced with a werewolf. Which led to his falling and breaking arm. And, in his current state of near constant acrimony, no amount of explaining by his mother could make that right. And as such, the Kapsbrack house was tense, and when the doorbell rang on the morning of what would be a hot, muggy day in mid-July, Eddie, who was in the kitchen stirring his oatmeal, quickly lifted himself up and started

toward the door./p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;""I'll get it, Eddie..." Eddie's mother said, starting to get herself up from her loveseat. Eddie, however, held up his good hand./p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;""I got it, mom. Just stay in your chair..." Eddie said, a certain belligerence in his tone. He went past her and opened the door. Richie was standing there, with a drawstring bag on his back Eddie assumed had span style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-weight: inherit; font-style: oblique; font-family: inherit; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 0px; padding: 0px;""Trouble /spanin it. He was holding his bike, and nodded to Eddie./p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;""I... uh...thought maybe...you'd want to hang out. If...uh..."/p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;""Yeah. I'm coming..." Eddie said, and walked back to the kitchen. He put the half-eaten oatmeal in the sink, checked his blood-sugar, then walked back to the door./p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;""Eddie..." his mother started, leaning forward in the loveseat. Eddie turned on her, glowering./p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;""I'm

leaving, mom. I'm going with Richie. I don't care what you say or what you want..."/p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;""Eddie...just, take your fanny pack...for your insulin..." his mother leaned over and picked up the discard bag. Eddie eyed it, then snatched it from her and went out of the house. Richie watched him walk past, then leaned back toward the heavy woman./p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;""I'll bring him back safely, Ms. Kapsbrack! I promise, I won't let anything happen to your precious little boy!" Richie said, winking at Eddie, who rolled his eyes./p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;""Beep-beep Richie...let's go," Eddie said, pulling the fanny pack around his waist and clicking the plastic buckle into place. Richie nodded and pulled his bike out to the street. He got onto the front, then helped Eddie get on behind him./p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;""You okay?" Richie asked. Eddie slipped his unbroken arm tightly around Richie's chest. And, as had happened the few times he'd hung out with Richie, the anger abated...somewhat./p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;""Yeah. I've got hold of you..." Eddie said. Richie looked back at him and smiled, then started to pedal./p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana,

Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;"

"Very good then, sir!" Richie started, using his British accent, "Welcome about the Richie Tozier express. We offer a premier bike riding service at little to no cost, wot-wot and all that..." Eddie scoffed at the boy, but had to admit Richie's voices were getting better. This one was almost passable./p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;"

"Where are we going today? Your house? The riverside? Or do you want to try the arcade again?" Eddie asked, recalling, somewhat grumpily that he'd caused his good hand and a few of his broken fingers a great deal of pain last time they'd played

span style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-weight: inherit; font-style: oblique; font-family: inherit; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 0px; padding: 0px;"

Street Fighter/

span. Richie, however, cleared his throat, then spoke in his normal voice./p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;"

"Actually...uh...my mother told me I should really go hang out with Ben Hanscom. Apparently, he's called a couple times, usually when I've been out with you. And I...wouldn't mind seeing old Big Ben. At least for a little bit. Is...uh...that okay? To hang out with him? We don't have to, it can be just the two of us..." Eddie hesitated, then sighed./p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;"

"It's fine, Richie..." Eddie said. He took a deep breath and tried not to get too mad, especially about something so petty. Sure, he liked the other members of the Loser Club, but...Richie was special to him. And, over the past week and some, he'd really been reminded of how much Richie mattered. Which made it even stupider and petty that he was unhappy he'd have to share Richie by hanging out with Ben as well. But, Richie was right. It would be good see Ben and do things with

some of the club again, "I'll hang out with you and Ben..."

"Good, because span style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-weight: inherit; font-style: oblique; font-family: inherit; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 0px; padding: 0px;"Trouble /spanis funner with three you know. It says so on the box..."

"I think it says more fun with four. And Richie, you know span style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-weight: inherit; font-style: oblique; font-family: inherit; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 0px; padding: 0px;"Trouble /spanis just like span style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-weight: inherit; font-style: oblique; font-family: inherit; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 0px; padding: 0px;"Ludo, /spanthe stupid game my mom used to make me play when I was littlespan style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-weight: inherit; font-style: oblique; font-family: inherit; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 0px; padding: 0px;".../span"

"No, Eddie, the pieces are different. And so is the route...plus the die is in a sphere you smack! You know, a bubble you give a good gob-smashing to..." Richie switched back to the accent and Eddie sighed. He continued talking up the positives of span style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-weight: inherit; font-style: oblique; font-family: inherit; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 0px; padding: 0px;"Trouble /spanin increasingly worse accents until they reached the Hanscom home. Which Eddie had to admit was stunning. Ben's home was a large, two story brick structure, with two tall chimneys, a big spacious lawn dotted with towering trees, and the entrance was marked with two tall columns that supported a beautiful second floor balcony. As they arrived on the well-manicured grass, Richie got off

his bike, then he gently helped Eddie off before sending his ride rolling toward one of Ben's trees and turning to go to the front door. He raised a fist and started banging on the big oak double doors before Eddie grabbed him with the un-casted hand and pulled him back./p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;""Are you crazy? Why are you going at his door like that?"/p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;""Because...why do you care, Eddie?"/p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;""Because I don't want you to look like an idiot. Or a lunatic."/p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;""And I don't give a fuck what I look like..." Eddie paused in his response, then dropped his eyes./p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;""You don't care...even what I think?"/p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;""Well, do you think I look like a lunatic?" Richie said, leaning in and giving his best lunatic glare. Eddie was off-put by the glare, but also by how close Richie was to his face. His heart skipped a beat before he leaned back himself./p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;""Well, Richie, when you do that..."/p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;""Guys?" Eddie and Richie turned to see Ben had opened the door and was looking over the two, "Everything alright?"/p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;""Yeah..." Richie said, standing up and giving a more normal smile./p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;""Swell..." Eddie said, still off-put by what just happened./p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;""Good! Welcome!" Ben said, then grabbed Richie around his arms and hugged him tightly, drawing a grunt from the smaller boy. "It's good to see you guys!" Ben turned and held out an arm. Eddie, slowly, moved over to the boy and put the good arm around his big torso. It was so big...he was so muscular. Eddie was a skinny little twig and Richie's body wasn't much better, maybe more fat. But Ben...Ben's body...was like a well-made statue./p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;""Come on in. Or we can go out...whatever you prefer..." Richie looked up at the bright, hot sun above them, then back at Ben./p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family:

'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;""Well...since I'm going to have to sit through Stan's Bar Mitzvah through most of tomorrow, I think I'd like a spot of air conditioning, if you don't mind, dear sir..." Richie said, tipping a fake hat. Ben looked him over then let out a laugh./p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;""That was almost a British accent. Come on..." Eddie followed Richie into the house slowly. While part of him was almost happy to be doing exactly the opposite his mother wanted, he also felt a little bad defying her so completely. The last time Richie, Eddie and Ben had been together, he'd broken his arm and nearly been eaten. But...he only felt a little guilty about that./p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;""Wow..." Richie uttered as he stepped into Ben's house, "Whew, you got yourself a real nice living space here, bud..." Eddie agreed, walking slowly through what was a large living room, with two big white chairs, a matching couch on a fancy looking carpet. The room was defined by two long sets of stairs, one going up to the lower level, the other trailing down to what was probably a basement./p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;""Thanks..." Ben said, bouncing his eyebrows. After a moment, a short woman with thick glasses and short grey hair stepped into the room, holding a tray with glasses of lemonade. This was Arlene Hanscom, who held out the drinks and give the two boys a big smile./p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;""Thanks..." Ben said, bouncing his eyebrows. After a moment, a short woman with thick glasses and short grey hair stepped into the room, holding a tray with glasses of lemonade. This was Arlene Hanscom, who held out the drinks and give the two boys a big smile./p

1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;""Welcome, boys. You must be Richie. And you, poor thing, must be Eddie. Oh, how is your arm, son..."/p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;""It doesn't hurt anymore. It just itches..." Eddie muttered. Richie smiled and grabbed both lemonades, then took a long sip from one./p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;""Hmm...this is really good. Nice and tart..." Richie put the other lemonade to Eddie's lips, then the smaller boy grabbed the drink and pulled it away from Richie./p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;""Ahem...I got it, Richie..." Eddie said. Ben's mom smiled and looked them over./p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;""Is there anything else I can get you? Some celery, or carrots? Or some fruit?"/p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;""Fruit? Where's the candy or cookies, sugar?" Richie asked. Ben stepped in front of his mom before she could answer and put an arm around her./p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;""Okay. Thank you, mom. I appreciate it..."/p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;""Alright, Ben, you know I've got a Legion Auxiliary Women's meeting today, so I'll be gone most the day..."/p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;""I know, mom. Have fun..." Ben said. Ben's mother turned one last time to Eddie and Richie and waved./p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;""Feel free to grab anything in the fridge. We don't have any candies or sugar in this household though..." Ben continued to escort his mother away, while Eddie and Richie watched./p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;""No sweets? How in the hell do you live like that?" Richie asked./p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;""Maybe you get a big, muscular form...like Ben..." Eddie said, taking a sip of the lemonade. It was tart, and not real sweet. In fact, it was almost like there was something else in it, one of those fake sweeteners his mother always grabbed for her iced tea the few times the Kapsbracks went out. Richie, however, clearly wasn't bothered by the taste, and drank back most of the lemonade, as Ben returned./p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;""Sorry, my mom gets real interested in my friends sometimes...so, what'd

you bring Richie..." Richie, excitedly, opened his drawstring bag and revealed the board of span style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-weight: inherit; font-style: oblique; font-family: inherit; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 0px; padding: 0px;"Trouble, /spanwhich Ben took a hard look at./p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;"This looks like span style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-weight: inherit; font-style: oblique; font-family: inherit; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 0px; padding: 0px;"Parcheesi.../span" Ben said. Eddie looked at Richie, who cocked an eyebrow at Ben./p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;"span style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-weight: inherit; font-style: oblique; font-family: inherit; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 0px; padding: 0px;"Parcheesi? /spanThe fuck is span style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-weight: inherit; font-style: oblique; font-family: inherit; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 0px; padding: 0px;"Parcheesi/span?"/p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;"It's a game like...Nevermind. We can play that, let's go to the basement..." Ben led the two down the steps to a large space, with a bar to one side, a couch and chair placed in front of a big, new TV opposite it. To their right, windows and a glass door opened to the woods behind Ben's house. Richie took a look around and whistled./p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;"Shit... I'd love to live in just in this fucker...I'll be back with a sleeping bag, Ben..." Richie said. Ben let out a laugh, then led them to a coffee table. Richie didn't make it, instead stopping by a bookshelf filled with video tapes, "Damn, buddy, what are all these? It appears to be

quiet ze collection,a, oui-oui!"/p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;""Beep-beep..." Eddie said to Richie's French accent, though Ben turned back and started pointing out videos./p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;""My dad loves collecting his and my favorites. These are the fantasies, these are the comedies, these are my mom's..." Ben plugged his nose, pointing at a collection of romantic comedies Eddie would've minded looking over a little closer, "And these...are the horror movies..."/p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;""Oh boy...span style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-weight: inherit; font-style: oblique; font-family: inherit; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 0px; padding: 0px;"the Thing...Nightmare on Elm Street, Hellraiser.../spanwhat's this?" Richie reached in and picked out a video titled span style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-weight: inherit; font-style: oblique; font-family: inherit; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 0px; padding: 0px;"Pet Semetary./span/p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;""Whoa man, that came out this year. That's one of the scariest movies I've ever seen. It's based on a book and that author is messed up!" Ben said. Richie looked at the cover, and nodded with a smile./p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;""Let's do it..." Richie said, taking it over and putting it into the VCR. As he rewound the movie, Eddie moved to take a spot opposite the TV,

hoping to miss most of it, and started to work on setting up Trouble. /span>Soon, they were playing and Ben and Richie were watching the couch. Eddie mostly ignored the movie, though a few screams led him to glance back. The movie was easy to ignore for the first hour, though, after that, it became loud and engrossing to both Ben and Richie./p

It's your turn..." Eddie said. After a moment and a loud scream, Eddie reached over and slapped Richie's leg, which led the boy to hit the dice bubble and then look over his scattered pieces./p

Dammit, here..." Richie moved his piece quickly, then Eddie looked at Ben, who drew back and groaned./p

Good lord..." Eddie waited a moment, then slapped his leg too./p

Play!"/p

I'm... hold on..." Ben said, then, something really dramatic happened, and both he and Richie let out a loud yelp. Eddie, refusing to turn around, stood up and sighed./p

Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;"I'm going to the bathroom..." /p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;"Oh, okay. We'll pause the movie...I'm gonna get some popcorn," Ben said, reaching over and using the remote, "Down that hall and to the left..." Eddie sighed and shook his head, preferring the whole movie finished while he was in the bathroom. Eddie went on in to the prettily done pink and blue room, then went through his fanny pack to get out a needle and his test strip. If they were going to eat popcorn, he had to keep an eye on his blood sugar, he supposed. He used the needle to draw blood from his broken arm's middle finger, then dripped a few drops onto a test strip, which he then jammed into a reader. He usually drew extra blood, as the reader often didn't work and at times needed multiple tests. This time, however, it registered, and he could see he had a normal glucose level. Eddie shoved all the equipment back into his fanny pack, then struggled with one hand to get himself out of his pants. Once he finally got to peeing, he sighed deeply and looked over at his broken arm and its cast, with LOSER written across it and Richie's big V drawn over the S. Richie drove Eddie nuts sometimes, but Richie was really a pretty good friend when it came down to it. He supposed he could let Ben sign or mark up the cast. As Eddie was thinking this and urinating, however, he heard a noise, almost a whisper, call his name./p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;"Eddie..." Eddie pinched it and turned around, and seeing nothing, resumed, only to have the call start again./p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;"Eddie..." This was a sing-songy voice Eddie knew belonged to that idiot friend./p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family:

'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;""Richie, motherfucker, I'm pissing!" Eddie said, "Leave me alone!" There was a pause, then, a different sound, a much more muted Richie started yelling at the door./p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;""Eddie!" Richie called, "Why are you yelling my name? You need me to hold your dick for you?" Eddie felt a shiver run through him as it became clear that the voice calling him was different than the Richie outside the door. After a moment, the other Richie's voice returned, this time, coming from the drain of the sink. Eddie turned to it, a giggling and resonating tone that made Eddie shiver./p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;""Come on Eddie...let's go float..." Richie's voice said. Eddie shook himself off as quickly as possible, then grabbed the drain plug on the side of Ben's sink and slammed it in, shutting off the sound. Eddie, gulped, then flushed the toilet and rushed out back into the basement./p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;""Guys!"/p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;""Eddie? Did you wash your fucking hands?" Richie asked. Ben looked the boy over and shook his head./p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;""That's just gross man..." Ben agreed, crossing his arms./p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;""Wait, guys, wait..." Eddie struggled, but Richie flung a hand out at the boy./p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;""Also, Eddie, XYZ! We can see your boxers all jammed out through your zipper..."/p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;""Guys, stop! The...the drain...it..." Eddie trailed off, as he turned to the TV, and saw that the main character, a middle aged man played by Dale Midkiff, was backing away from a large, king cobra snake./p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;""Ben... is there a snake in span style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-weight: inherit; font-style: oblique; font-family: inherit; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 0px; padding: 0px;"Pet Semetary?/span"/p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;""Uh...I don't remember one..." Ben said, "I hate snakes. Why wouldn't I have noticed that? Where are we in the movie..." Ben started over to the VCR, and pressed the rewind button, but there was no response on the screen. Instead, Eddie saw the snake turn toward the three boys, and hiss, then writhed out of sight. And that made the small, diabetic boy start to whimper./p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;""Uh...I don't remember one..." Ben said, "I hate snakes. Why wouldn't I have noticed that? Where are we in the movie..." Ben started over to the VCR, and pressed the rewind button, but there was no response on the screen. Instead, Eddie saw the snake turn toward the three boys, and hiss, then writhed out of sight. And that made the small, diabetic boy start to whimper./p

1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;""It... It...the clown...is here..." Eddie said. Richie looked at him in horror, then turned back in time to see Ben go flying back from the VCR and over his coffee table, sending the span style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-weight: inherit; font-style: oblique; font-family: inherit; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 0px; padding: 0px;"Trouble /spanboard and the pieces with it flying. And Eddie started to hyperventilate as a king cobra snake slid out of the VCR./p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;""What the fuck?" Richie called, rushing to Ben and helping the boy stand. Ben, surprisingly cowered from the swaying cobra, but Richie picked up a shoe and held it threateningly at the creature./p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;""Too slow, Richie..." the snake uttered, slipping back into the VCR. Richie hesitated, his shoe still held high, then moved slowly toward the VCR and very carefully opened the slot to reveal only a video tape. Eddie looked around the room, but saw nothing else out of the ordinary. Eddie sighed and started to breath more normally, before he felt the fingers of a cold, undead hand slipped slowly around his neck. Eddie let out a small whimper, then turned around to see it was Richie... sort've. The boy had his signature glasses, tee shirt and tight sports pants, but he looked more doll like, and had part of his face eaten by maggots, which crawled out of his face and made Eddie whimper./p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;""Come on Eds. Let's go float. Just us two. Together...forever Eddie..." Eddie looked at the doll of his friend, which sounded just like the boy, then back at the Richie standing next to Ben still focused on the VCR. He glanced again at the undead thing, which gave a big smile, and ran a hand across Eddie's face, then gripped his cast in a way that made Eddie start to whine with pain./p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family:

'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;""Don't you want to be with me? Your best friend? Especially since It already got me...I'm already missing you know...but if you come with me, we can be together...we can float together, forever..." undead Richie's face was getting really, really close, and Eddie was struggling to make a noise. Then, the real Richie turned around and yelled./p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;""Hey! Get the fuck off of Eds!" Richie yelled. The undead doll Richie turned to him and let out a laugh. Eddie looked at Richie to see the boy hesitate, then he held up the shoe again, "Ugh, gross, it's you...er... me again..." Richie looked over the ugly version of himself, which clicked its tongue and smiled./p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;""You're dead Richie...you're going to be forgotten...and now, you're taking Eddie with you..." Richie's eyes grew wide and he started to screamed./p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;""I'm not dead! I'm...I'm not missing! No! No!" Richie yelled, then dropping the shoe. The other version of Richie stuck an arm out, which extended, dramatically and gripped Richie's throat. Richie was dragged across the room, and now, the doll Richie had become the clown, and he was holding both boys by the necks./p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;""I've got you both now...Eds here, and Richie-boy..." the clown said, giving them each a big smile. Eddie looked over the clown, desperate for something to help him. The clown revealed its big collection of

teeth, and opened its mouth in a slow ominous way, when it's eyes suddenly darkened. It shut its mouth and looked over Eddie, its smile slipping momentarily into a frown. After a few seconds more, the frown became a smile again, but Eddie noted that it smile looked different, like the monster was faking it. And that gave Eddie an insane idea./p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;"What...are you doing here, you ugly creature? You...made this time string for me...helped me change it...but...you are...here... helping him...fight me?" the clown uttered this slowly as Eddie reached down and unzipped out something from his fanny pack. He didn't know what it was, but he assumed it was some extra placebo his mom had put in the bag. If he faked what it was, like imagining his inhaler had had battery acid in it, he might be able to hurt it. He picked the object up and aimed it at the clown's mouth. But, it wasn't his inhaler. It was the needle he'd used to check his blood sugar. That still had his bad blood in it./p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;"What is this?" the clown questioned, "Feeling a little light headed Eddie... need to check your..." the clown couldn't finish, as Eddie jabbed the needle as hard as he could into the clown's hand. It elicited a loud, horrible cry, and Eddie could see black liquid moving around where the needle meet it's flesh, then the blood started moving up the arm, leaving a trail of decaying flesh on the way. The clown dropped Eddie and let out a cry of pain, then flung Richie into the approaching Ben./p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;"You poisoned me! You son of a bitch, you betrayed me!" The clown turned its head and pointed at Eddie, "You fucking Rat! I'll kill your host, and drive you out of this world! This is my time string! I will survive, I will destroy the children, then I will help the Crimson King

destroy your precious beams and tower, you ugly, awful..." the clown roared this at Eddie for a few moments, but he could see his bad blood was corrupting the clown's flesh, and he watched it drive up the monster's neck to its face. It let out a slight noise, then, it's right eye exploded, sending blood and goo all over Eddie, leading the boy to scream./p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;"Eddie cowered from the spewing liquid as the clown slouched, letting out a loud, painful sounding groan. It dropped both Eddie and Richie, then shuffled toward the bathroom behind them, blood leaking down its face as it swayed away from them. Eddie, covered in the gore, was hesitant to move, but Ben had jumped to his feet, and he was holding a discus. He chased the clown toward the bathroom, but Eddie saw something small and brown, what he soon saw was the drain plug, come flying out of the bathroom and smack Ben in the face. It stunned the muscular boy, then Eddie heard the sound of something big flushing, so big, in fact, that it started banging against porcelain, on the verge of breaking it. It went down though, as he next heard the sound of something rattling against a metal pipe. And then, it was gone. No more sounds from the bathroom, no more clown in Ben's basement./p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;"Eddie's breath started to slow, and he looked over his blood soaked shirt and pants, then at his cast, which, amazingly, was still white, other than loser with the V written over the S. Eddie looked back up at Richie, who was glanced over the boy and whistled./p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;"Well, you got him, Eds..." Richie said, leaning down, pushing Eddie's boxers back through his fly and zipping him up. Eddie glanced down at it, then at Richie, who bounced his eyebrows, "I suppose I'll have to undress you, and get you some new clothes..." /p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;""It said something to me..." Eddie said, trying to recall the events of what had just happened, "It said...I was the host for something..."/p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;""Host for what?"/p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;""I don't know. But it called it a rat and said it betrayed it..." Eddie sighed, and slowly picked himself up, then raised his arms./p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;""Go ahead...I can't wear this bloody clothes..." Eddie said. Richie smiled widely, then gripped Eddie's shirt, purposefully tickling the boy's waist, "Ack, Richie stop!"/p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;""Don't get too excited Eds!" Richie said, then jerking the shirt up, pulled it up over Eddie's head and over his cast. He was about to go for the pants when Ben stepped over toward them, a big gash across his forehead. Richie drew back and pointed at him in horror./p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;""Good God, look at this motherfucker! You're brains are spilling out down your shirt! Did you at least kill the clown?"/p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana,

Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;"I... no..." Ben looked at the shirtless Eddie for a moment, then focused back on Richie, "But...it's hurt. Eddie...you got it good..." Eddie smiled, then signaled to Ben with his cast. And at that moment, he noticed that his anger...was gone. In fact, he was almost happy, even with his good clothes covered in evil clown muck./p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;"You, uh, have some new clothes for me?"/p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;"Uh... yeah..." Ben started away, then turned back to Richie and Eddie, "By the way...Bill, Bev and I...we're building a dam..." Eddie looked back at Richie, who undid Eddie's belt and pulled it from the pants, causing Eddie to nearly fall./p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;"A dam? The hell you gonna do with a dam?" Richie asked, pointing at Ben with Eddie's blood soaked belt, "Where are you fuckers even gonna put it?"/p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;"In the barrens...Bill...Bill's set on it..." Ben said, shrugging./p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family: 'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;"We haven't built a dam since...me and Stan and you..." Richie signaled to Eddie, then he trailed off, "Bill wants to bring us back together, that son of a bitch, well, I think..." /p

p style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-size: 15.12px; font-family:

'Lucida Grande', 'Lucida Sans Unicode', 'GNU Unifont', Verdana, Helvetica, sans-serif; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 1.286em auto; padding: 0px; line-height: 1.5; color: #2a2a2a;""It will kill the clown..." Eddie said suddenly. It was a thought, the thought of whatever was...using or channeling through him. The...span style="border: 0px; outline: 0px; font-weight: inherit; font-style: oblique; font-family: inherit; vertical-align: baseline; list-style: none; margin: 0px; padding: 0px;"rat. /spanBut...it was true, he knew it, "We have to help build the dam..." Eddie said, letting Richie pull his pants off, "That's how we kill It."/p